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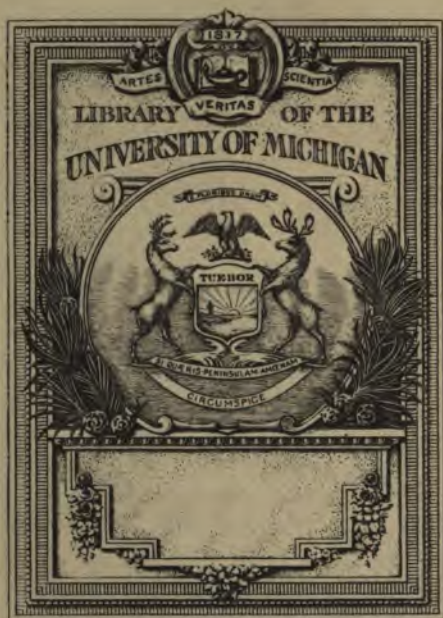
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Mary B. Cheney
from Lucy Hildner
Christmas, 1898



LITERARY LIKINGS



LITERARY LIKINGS

1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of various factors on the performance of a system. The study is organized as follows: Section 2 describes the system and the factors being studied. Section 3 presents the experimental design and the results of the experiments. Section 4 discusses the implications of the results and the conclusions of the study.

The system under study is a complex system with many components. The factors being studied are the input variables that affect the system's performance. The experimental design is a factorial design with two factors and two levels for each factor.

The results of the experiments show that the system's performance is significantly affected by the input variables. The conclusions of the study are that the system's performance can be improved by optimizing the input variables.

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LITERARY LIKINGS

By

RICHARD BURTON



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1898



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TO MY WIFE

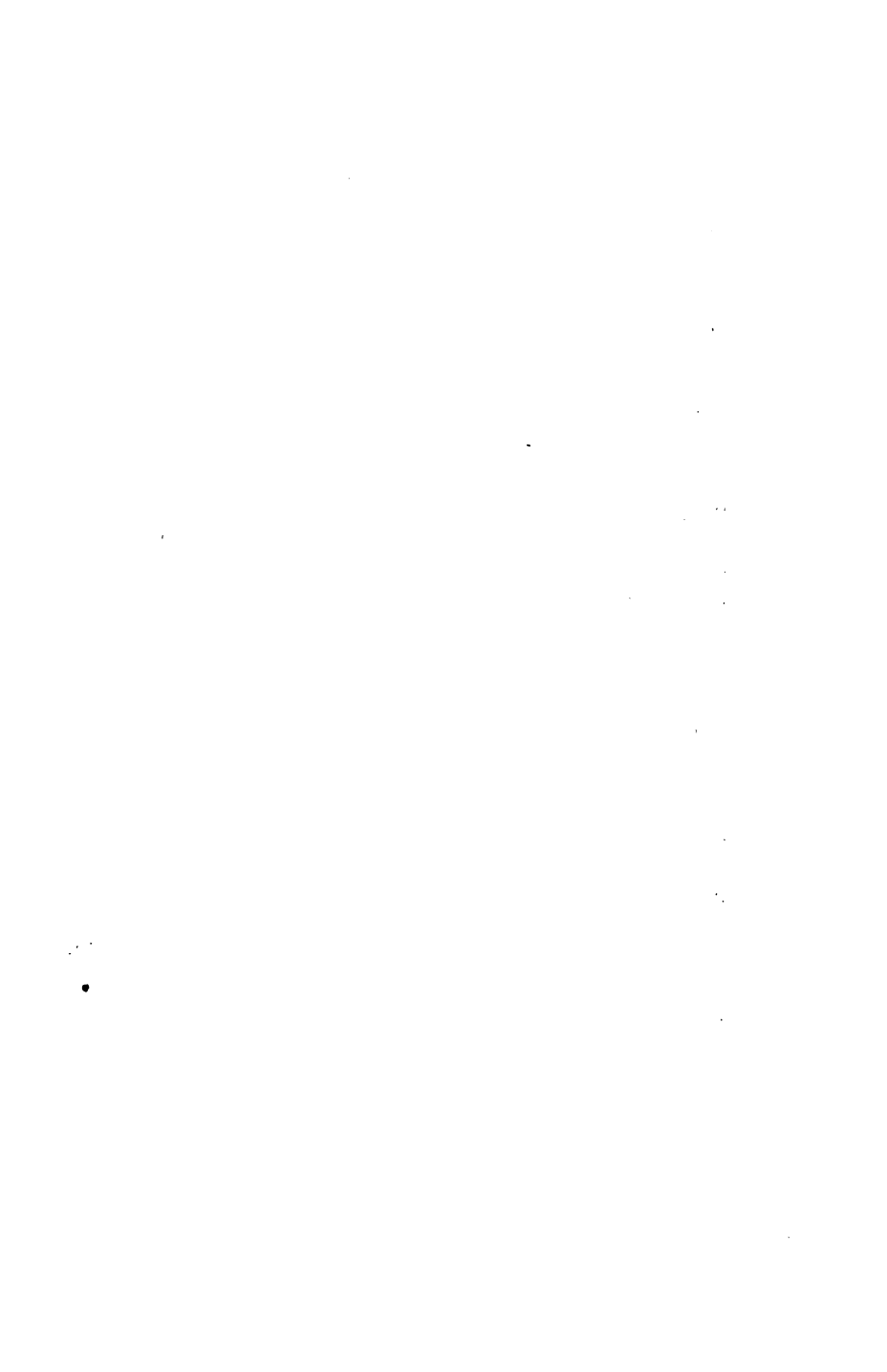
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NOTE

The papers making up this volume have with one or two exceptions appeared previously in the columns of *The Forum*, *The Atlantic*, *The North American Review*, *The New England Magazine*, *The Dial*, *Poet Lore*, and other publications. The writer herewith acknowledges the courtesy of the editors in allowing him to reprint the essays.

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Robert Louis Stevenson

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON



I

THE day has not yet come perhaps for an impartial judiciary on Robert Louis Stevenson. Contemporary criticism proverbially walks in Blind Man's Alley. But it is difficult not to speak of Stevenson, because, aside from his being a distinctive writer of his day and generation, he was the best-loved personality among current English writers. It is as impossible not to enter into intimate, affectionate relations with him as it is in the case of Charles Lamb. Hence the chorus of praise, the many confessions of faith, that have followed upon his lamentable taking-off in the prime of his literary powers. Great makers of literature—men who mean much to us and do much for us—are by no means of necessity loved in proper person. Wordsworth or Goethe may have long been my literary idols: it

does not imply that I would have given a shilling to meet them in the flesh; whereas I would have paid blood and treasure for a half hour's chat with Stevenson. But love for the man and his work may not justify another attempt at appreciation. Some Frenchman has told us that one needs not only to love, but to love gracefully. Yet affection should be a sort of lamp for guidance in the discovery of quality; moreover, the sympathetic author seems to say some special thing to one's self alone, and the admirer can but feel that certain phases of a writer's gift have not been indicated in true proportion or significance.

II

The story of Stevenson's life will have a steadfast fascination. There was in it enough of variety and picturesqueness to catch the eye; while, deeper down, one feels the pulse of the hero, the pathos of the struggle of a man bodily frail, intrepid of spirit, indomitably set upon brave accomplishment. This has all the more of pathetic appeal because of the fine, high-bred reserve practised by Stevenson in his

literary work, concerning his physical ailments. The only reference I recall in the whole range of his writings intended for publication (even in the *Vailima Letters* such allusions are curiously absent) is that in the charming paper called *The Manse*, where, speaking of a clergyman-ancestor who was of a sickly habit of body, the essayist remarks: "Now I often wonder what I have inherited from this old minister. I must suppose indeed that he was fond of preaching sermons, and so am I, though I never heard it maintained that either of us loved to hear them. He sought health in his youth in the Isle of Wight, and I have sought it in two hemispheres; but whereas he found and kept it, I am still on the quest." The delicacy and simplicity of this make it very beautiful. Stevenson had no trace of that unpleasant egoism which makes a man whine over himself. The typical mood, private or public, is that expressed in the meeting with a friend, who, after a long separation, inquired of him what he had been about. "Well, my dear fellow," quoth Louis gayly, — it was at Bournemouth at a time when, in a phrase of his

own, he was "far through," — "I have been principally engaged in the business of dying, and you see I have made a failure of it." The pluck and gallantry of the answer are representative.

Stevenson, a Scot of distinguished family, was a Bohemian, a world wanderer; one of the main denotements of his individuality is the way in which, through it all, despite the enforced cosmopolitanism of his life, he remained a son of Scotland in blood and bone. He was a native of Scotia not so much in insular prejudices as in his cast of mind and play of emotion. An essay like *The Foreigner at Home*, the Scotch fictions led by that incomparable fragment *Weir of Hermiston*, are documents in the case. They stand for what was ingrain. Under the alien brilliancy of his dress and far below the facile adaptation to the customs of various climes, deep called unto deep in his nature, and steadily, faithfully he found his orientation in Edinburgh, city of his kinsmen and love. He was, after all, a clannish man to the last. Read *The Tropics Vanish* to realize it. Once set him

"In the highlands, in the country places,"

and "the spate of style" came, with the vision and the creative gust. With a nature less strong, this abiding quality would not have been. Examples among living writers lack not where cultured cosmopolitanism has pretty much effaced race lines. It is only the sturdy men, the true independents of literature, who can resist the influence. Turgenev and Sienkiewicz are such individualities; Stevenson is of their company. The loveliness of the man has somewhat obscured our sense of his strength in this regard.

His death was commensurate with his life; in accord with his wish, it had a rare and exquisite fitness: a sudden brave finish, the pen still wet from an unfinished masterpiece. The stale tedium of the sick-room — against which in more than one essay he eloquently harangues — was spared him. He fell in mid-manhood in a creative flush of accomplishment, secure in the admiration of the world of readers, cherished in loving and loyal memory by those privileged to come into contact with him in the body. The affection of the Samoan natives, to whom in those few final years he became law-giver, counsellor,

friend, and Teller of Tales, is a black-letter index of his magnetism, his great gift of heart. From boyhood there was about him an atmosphere of refinement, an air of romantic grace: to be noted in his very clothes, in the eye-sparkle, the mobile play of the mouth, and the odd, whimsical, capricious elegance of his speech. His talk with his familiars, I am credibly informed, had the same quality as that of his choicest essays. It has been often remarked, truly enough, that in an almost unique degree we note in Stevenson the survival of youthfulness. Deep in his soul the imperishable boy abided to the end. *Child Play*, *The Lantern Bearers*, *A Child's Garden*, and most of the volume *Virginibus Puerisque* are in evidence. But to regard this quality as striking the keynote of his personality is woefully to err, to substitute the part for the whole. The assumption overlooks the complexity of the man, the many-sidedness of his nature — best suggested in his friend Henley's sonnet characterization :

APPARITION.

Thin-legged, thin-chested, slight unspeakably,
Neat-footed and weak-fingered : in his face —

Lean, large-boned, curved of beak, and touched with
 race,
 Bold-lipped, rich-tinted, mutable as the sea,
 The brown eyes radiant with vivacity —
 There shines a brilliant and romantic grace,
 A spirit intense and rare, with trace on trace
 Of passion and impudence and energy.
 Valiant in velvet, light in ragged luck,
 Most vain, most generous, sternly critical,
 Buffoon and poet, lover and sensualist :
 A deal of Ariel, just a streak of Puck,
 Much Antony, of Hamlet most of all,
 And something of the Shorter-Catechist.

It is this very manifoldness of Stevenson which has thrown critics off the scent. Most writers of saliency take a position with the Left or Right in literature. Stevenson possessed sympathies which drew him both ways. He was in some particulars a daring radical : in others an aristocrat, sitting with the extreme conservatives. He is a literary force not at all easy to catalogue or keep under a rubric. This becomes apparent only when the full content of his work has been surveyed.

III

The public knows him most familiarly through his fiction, nor should his contributions in this sort be minimized, espe-

cially since here one gets his romanticism in process of demonstration. The wholesome reactionary influence of Stevenson's novels must be emphasized: in them his romantic theory is implicit, as it is explicit in some of his essays. From the morbid analysis, the petty detail, and the pornographic filth of that miscalled thing realism, his *view ballo* called us back to the happy hunting-grounds of the older story of incident, adventure, heroic personages. He looked upon life (for the purposes of fiction) not only as a stage for high-hearted action, but as a sort of Continuous Performance full of change, bustle, and indefinite opportunities of amusement. While the novelist Stevenson is not all of Stevenson nor Stevenson at his deepest, the result is always welcome, not seldom superb. With the in-creeeping of the more subjective — as in the characteristic and too little known *Prince Otto* — comes a feeling on the part of the public that this is not in the typical vein; hence the tale is not so garishly popular. The public has insisted indeed on regarding Stevenson as, *par excellence*, a romanticist only in the sense of one who

tells an objective tale with little care for character as such ; which is all wrong, since in works like the *Master of Ballantrae* and *Weir* characterization is the prime motive ; as it is, moreover, in such a creation as his *Ebb Tide*. This affixion of the romantic tag to Stevenson's coat has given color to the idea of him as one who held his art as a means of pleasure-giving, nothing more. It may be observed in passing that this is by no means necessarily a low ideal ; it all depends upon your definition of the Protean word *pleasure*. But one who stops here with Stevenson is again off the scent. Even if we do not overstep the bounds of the novel, to read the stories ruminatingly and in their full content is to realize that the author is no more romantic than realistic ; that he is both objective and subjective ; Stevenson, in truth, sums up in his own person the proper relation of ideal to actual. His interest in life as fact and detail was immense, constant ; his inferences (in his fiction) were blithely romantic. His own sprightly genius formed the connecting link between those erroneously reckoned contradictions.

Stevenson's tales offer a kind of common meeting-ground for readers of opposing minds and creeds. The lovers of romance — a sight of folks is here! — hail them gleefully, as a matter of course; believers in "realism" yield such fiction at least a grudging approval — since, after all, they belong to humankind and enjoy what is enjoyable; while they who stickle for style are fed so high that they do willingly overlook so vulgar a thing as a rattling good plot. He who gets no satisfaction from *Treasure Island* or *Kidnapped* is a rarer bird than the Dodo. It is one of Stevenson's merits in such books that he administers ether to the critic who, boy-like, loses sight of technique in pleasure and, coming later out of the swoon, finds his proper joy in tasting quality and detecting the fine art of the performance. The sense of literature is forgotten for the nonce in the sense of the joy of life — the joy which Oswald in *Ghosts* longs for so piteously, — and which every son of woman who is in health and antecedent to his dotage demands at Fate's hands.

IV

It is no belittlement of the fiction, however, to find the realest Stevenson, the most intimate exposure of himself, in the essays and poetry. It is hardly too much to say that one knows him not until he is known here. As an essayist Stevenson has the preserving qualities: charm, rich suggestiveness, wisdom lightly carried, distinction of manner. In the essay an author stands self-revealed; he may mask behind other literary forms, in some measure; but commonplaceness, vulgarity, thinness of nature, are in this kind instantly uncovered. The essay is for this reason a severe test. Character speaks in and through it; the deepest and most winsome of a man comes out often in an essay; he invites you into a confidential, quiet-furnished corner of his soul, there to listen to a conversation that is at once colloquial and confessional. And style, manner, is to the essay what water is to the fish: an element native to its progress. When talking of the essay it is inevitable to consider an author's way of saying things. Lowell once declared

of Sidney Lanier that he had a genius for the happy word; to few could the remark have been applied more fitly than to Stevenson. His diction is not seldom spoken of as if its main feature were co-ordination or general harmony. It is true that it was admirably of a piece: he learned to find and keep the "essential note." Yet this is not his most noticeable hallmark on the side of style. He was startlingly felicitous as a coiner of word and phrase. Swift's narrow definition of style as the right words in the right places leaves untold the more important half of the story. The "right" word is well; the correct writer acceptable. But there is something besides right and wrong in the selection and marshalling of words for literary purposes: there is good, better, best; we must reckon with the unexpected and the delightful. To use the right word is a sort of negative virtue: to use the creative word, — unlooked-for, a glad surprise to reader and writer alike, — that is quite another and higher thing. The difference between the two is a measure between talent and genius. Certain critics harp upon what they call the "inevitable"

in diction. *Pace* Flaubert! there is no such thing; if there were, literature would be mathematics. Stevenson's pages have these frequent windfalls for us; we mark the passages, and, returning on the page, smack our lips over the more leisurely second tasting. After all, it will not do to forget that to the truly elect of literature expression, if not all, is much; the right turning of a phrase gives such an one a rapture greater than would the taking of a city. To some the joy will seem disproportionate, nugatory; which is but additional proof of the exquisiteness of the experience.

Now, one feels in reading Robert Louis Stevenson's finest papers—careless, inimitable causeries on books, men, life, the moral verities—the theme is naught, handling everything—that here is the manner of a master; a man with infinite good temper, perfect breeding, and character. Not to recognize the character, along with and over and above the style, is, in a way, to announce one's limitations. Follow the essays along the line of Stevenson's artistic and spiritual development; from the slightly self-conscious cloth-of-

gold beauty of *Ordered South*, written at twenty-two, the marvel of a stripling, to the *Christmas Sermon* and *Pulvis et Umbra*, mellow, majestic deliverances, nobly reflective and surcharged with the ethic temper; and what you notice equally with the gain in æsthetic command is the broadening and deepening of the man's soul. Here is high thought solvent in emotion; emotion held in check by art that has acquired a law-abiding freedom. And between these chronologic extremes lie what winsome and alluring things! What exceptional gift, charm, distinction! A side of the man's nature here blooms forth, hidden, or at least barely hinted, in the novels. His essential seriousness, his strong moral predilection, his hang for spiritual things, his poetry, his sublimated common-sense,—all of these qualities pervade the essay work, blending in the total effect as the juices of the new wine to make the subtle bouquet of the mellow vintage. With the exception of a very few of the latest poems, the intellectual maturity of Stevenson can nowhere else be seen so well.

“Of Hamlet most of all”—how admirable is Henley's stroke in its delicate

felicity of characterization ! In depth and suggestion, in gentle melancholy that runs not into whining nor stagnant pessimism, that in no wise contradicts the sturdy courage of his more objective and impersonal writing, Stevenson is, in sooth, a Hamlet ; but the tricky touch of Ariel and the whimsey of Puck are there, too, imparting tonic and lightness to his work. That the texture is slight, the subject matter by election light or discursive, none but the Philistine would speak for a reproach ; the fantasticality is a rich embroidery upon the enduring stuff of the thought. To call his themes far-fetched or trivial were to impugn Charles Lamb himself, or past masters in other tongues, like Montaigne or Richter,—the only possible excuse for discoursing of roast pig is the paper thereupon. No essayist ever got more out of nothing than did this frail son of Edinburgh. What a world of reminiscent tenderness, of shy ideality, of heart-piercing pathos, and of canny wisdom as well, is evoked, for example, by such a thing as *The Lantern Bearers* ! How the reader is led to realize the common childlikeness of us all ! Or

in *Beggars*, with its picturesque flavor yet moral sanity, do we not feel behind the raillery an impassioned belief in the universal brotherhood? No more delightful bit of egoism can be named than the *Chapter on Dreams*, a fairy tale, yet in full accord with modern psychology. One almost wonders that Stevenson did not anticipate Du Maurier and create *Peter Ibbetson*. In another vein, *Ordered South*, for its sane philosophy and pensive, dreamy loveliness of line and image cannot be fellowed in its particular *genre*; one cries, in gloating over it, "Here indeed is your cloth-of-gold style!" His, again, was the special gift for esoteric, desultory character limning, as in a slight paper like *The Manse*, as well as in more avowed attempts at full-length portraiture. Stevenson may not have had the historian's full equipment, but certainly his was a genius for biography; and biography is only history on its intimate and informal side. He had a rare relish for character-presentation, whether the subject were an unknown Samoan native or a Robert Burns. His personages, imagined in fiction or transferred from life, stood out saliently, in

high relief. How his admiration for main men, his hero-worship, comes out in a thing like *The English Admirals*, or how gallantly he cries up the savor of life, and frowns upon the craven fear of death, in *Aes Triplex*! In that wonderful little paper *Pulvis et Umbra* may be seen perhaps at its most puissant our writer's picturesque power, natural poetry, and unhackneyed manner of thought in the face of the grave, great things of Life and Death. The commonplace treatment of the theme of Evolution, and of man as its last consummate flower, is to drone along about the privilege of our high estate and the resultant duties. Not so Stevenson; contrariwise, with the pathos of imaginative poetry he defines *homo sapiens* as "condemned to some nobility," striving along with all lower creation towards an "unattainable ideal." And he deems it would declare man a poltroon if he, "the reasoner, the wise in his own eyes," should show the white feather and not strive on with all other sentient life. "Let it be enough for faith that the whole creation groans in mortal frailty, strives with unconquerable constancy; surely, not all in vain." It is

not skill or the revamping of the traditional that produces essays like these, albeit the technique is elegant. A nature large, serious, vital, begot them. The debt to the past is but the debt any thinker or writer owes to his intellectual forbears — to dodge the debt is to announce one's self a literary bankrupt. A common misconception in respect of Stevenson is that which, observing his technical power, the fine craftsmanship he displayed, stops short there. The Philistine can never get over or around Stevenson's indiscreetly frank avowal of his own literary methods, whence we hear now he "slogged at his trade" and "played the sedulous ape" to great writers during his novitiate. This is the confession of him who assumes that the untold half will not be forgotten, that the difference between the *lehrjahre* and *meisterjahre* will be appreciated. Those who insist that Robert Louis Stevenson was an accomplished, graceful technician and nothing more are wide of the mark. They should be directed especially to certain sentences in the paper which tells of his obligation to chiefs of the craft — sentences deserving the higher accent of italics:

"Perhaps I hear some one cry out : But this is not the way to be original ! It is not ; nor is there any way but to be born so. Nor yet, if you are born original, is there anything in this training that shall clip the wings of your originality. There can be none more original than Montaigne, neither could any be more unlike Cicero ; yet no craftsman can fail to see how much the one must have tried in his time to imitate the other. Burns is the very type of a prime force in letters : he was of all men the most imitative. Shakespeare himself, the imperial, proceeds directly from a school. It is only from a school that we can expect to have good writers ; it is almost invariably from a school that great writers, these lawless exceptions, issue. Nor is there anything here that should astonish the considerate. Before he can tell what cadences he truly prefers, the student should have tried all that are possible ; before he can choose and preserve a fitting key for words, he should long have practised the literary scales ; and it is only after years of such gymnastic that he can sit down at last, legions of words swarming to his call, dozens of turns of phrase simultaneously bidding for his choice, and he himself knowing what he wants to do and (within the narrow limit of a man's ability) able to do it."

Stevenson, then, had both the natal gift and the necessary training ; a conjunction evocative of superior results in literature. The false and shallow dilemma suggested

by the Horatian dictum is in his person exposed in all its fallaciousness. The ethic, in truth, might be called the dominant note in his essays and verse; the ethic atmosphere never heading up in unpleasant didactic thunder-storms. To miss this quality in him is not to know the man in any saving sense. The universal ethic of comradeship is what he preached; loving-kindness was his religion. Above all he hated meanness, cruelty, and cant. Yet his tolerant, sunshiny doctrine did not prevent a full recognition of the sterner aspects of the moral order. Else had he not been true to his Calvinist ancestors. He felt the working of Law as against Love, and there is an Old Testament flavor to both thought and diction when he is upon such themes. The diction at the finest is saved from mere rhetoric by this tendency. Take in illustration one of the "purple patches" of his style, that superb apostrophe at the end of *The Christmas Sermon*:

"When the time comes that he should go, there need be few illusions left about himself. *Here lies one who meant well, tried a little, failed much*: surely that may

be his epitaph, of which he need not be ashamed. Nor will he complain at the summons which calls a defeated soldier from the field: defeated, ay, if he were Paul or Marcus Aurelius — but if there is still one inch of fight in his old spirit, undishonored. The faith which sustained him in his lifelong blindness and lifelong disappointment will scarce even be required in this last formality of laying down his arms. Give him a march with his old bones! There, out of the glorious sun-colored earth, out of the day and the dust and the ecstasy, — there goes another Faithful Failure!”

Compare this with a typical passage from a master of prose eloquence like Ruskin — whose spiritual fervor no one disputes. I should maintain that there is an equal moral fervor and lift, and less suspicion of fine writing, in the later man; which could only be when earnestness and honesty went hand in hand with talent. Stevenson does not allow sentimentality to emasculate his effect; as Hazlitt said of another, his style is “bottomed on the vernacular.” His feeling for idiom was wonderful. In fine, while the novels are

well worth a first reading, it is conceivable that one might hesitate at a second — at least in the case of the majority ; whereas the first reading of the essays is but an imperfect introduction to what shall be re-read times out of number, until it become a permanent possession.

V

The ascription of the title of poet to an essayist and story-maker of such quality might seem more debatable. In spite of that unique achievement *A Child's Garden of Verses*, — at the time of its publication the only collection of poems in the tongue properly to be called child poetry in contradistinction from poetry about children for the delectation of older folk, — the critic might well have hesitated to award to Stevenson the proud names of singer and maker. But with the appearance of the final edition of his metrical work, permitting for the first time an opinion based upon a complete survey, such reserve becomes unnecessary. The forty additional pieces of the final edition chiefly constitute the ground for the consideration of Steven-

son as a verse-writer of individuality and fine accomplishment. They show his genius at its ripest, and are as interesting for their mastery of the art of verse as they are moving in the imaginative revelation of his deepest nature. For strength and beauty we should, on the whole, point to them as the Scotchman's most authentic gift to poetry — this in spite of the charm of the child-verse, or the blameless loveliness of a lyric like the *Requiem*. Taken as a group, the poems produced while Stevenson was in the South Seas stand for his maturest thought expressed in forms most likely to give it permanence.

The verse referred to is embodied in the division entitled *Songs of Travel and Other Verses*. Certain things here, both in blank verse and lyric forms, must awaken the enthusiasm of any lover of fine poetry. They are to his verse what *Weir of Hermiton* is to his fiction — a noble culmination of his powers. A number of these poems are to be associated because of a common melancholy of sentiment. As if prescient of the not far distant end, the singer longs himself back to Scotland, broods on old ways and days ; he an exile

fain to return there, at least to die. As strong a piece of blank verse as he has ever written, and one of the stateliest yet most touching in modern poetry, is an embodiment of this feeling — that beginning

“The tropics vanish,”

with its infinitely pathetic close :

“The voice of generations dead
Summons me, sitting distant, to arise,
My numerous footsteps nimbly to retrace,
And, all mutation over, stretch me down
In that denoted city of the dead.”

Akin to this is the apostrophe to Sidney Colvin, where he begs his friend, entering the British Museum to begin his daily toil, to send a thought to the South Seas, “so far, so foreign,” and the beautifully tender *To my Old Familiars*, in which the poet asseverates his belief that, in the very article of death, the scenes of home, “the emptiness of youth,”

“Filled with the sound of footsteps and that voice
Of discontent and rapture and despair,

will seize on his mind and blot out all else.

For sheer music-making, who has

wrought lyrics more infectious than *Bright is the Ring of Words* and *In the Highlands, in the Country Places*? There is a consummate perfection in such work that associates its writer with Poe and Swinburne; the loveliness of it is not for the moment's pleasure — it haunts and clings. Stevenson's creed is as nobly expressed in the following as is Kipling's in the *Envoy*, which closes *The Seven Seas*:

YOUTH AND LOVE.

- “ Once only by the garden gate
Our lips we joined and parted.
I must fulfil an empty fate
And travel the uncharted.
- “ Hail and farewell ! I must arise,
Leave here the fatted cattle,
And paint on foreign lands and skies
My Odyssey of battle.
- “ The untented Kosmos my abode,
I pass, a wilful stranger :
My mistress still the open road
And the bright eyes of danger.
- “ Come ill or well, the cross, the crown,
The rainbow or the thunder,
I fling my soul and body down
For God to plough them under.”

Stevenson's blank verse, as seen in the pieces mentioned and in other choice examples, had become a splendid and distinctive feature of his literary power. It possesses a Shakespearean virility and felicity of diction, and a varied music through the skilful shifting of the cæsura and an inerrant gift for tone-color, which, on the technical side, made it admirable. Then, for thought-stuff, it embodies, as I have said, the essential Stevenson, the Stevenson seen in *Pulvis et Umbra*; a brooding, analytic, modern mind, conscious of the awful antinomies of existence, yet hanging on to a shred of hope, courageous in the face of an apparently heartless fate. Intellectually, he was with J. A. Symonds, Richard Jefferies, Leslie Stephen, W. E. Henley,—an agnostic; temperamentally, artistically, an optimist—or at least, like George Eliot, a meliorist.

Then, still thinking of the poems which outbreathe nostalgia, that addressed to Crockett deserves a high place among the rhymed pieces:

“Blows the wind to-day, and the sun and the rain
are flying;
Blows the wind on the moors to-day and now.”

Again comes the deep desire, the refrain recurrent in so much of the latest utterance :

“ Be it granted to me to behold you again in dying,
Hills of home ! ”

till the sympathetic reader is chilled with the thought that his heartfelt longing was not gratified. That the minor note in these poems was rooted in a radical feeling that his end was fast drawing nigh, there are many little signs, some in *The Vailima Letters*, some in the verse. This brief blank-verse poem plainly voices the presentiment :

“ The morning drum-call on my eager ear
Thrills unforgotten yet ; the morning dew
Lies yet undried along my field of noon.
But now I pause at whiles in what I do
And count the bell, and tremble lest I hear
(My work untrimmed) the sunset gun too soon. ”

Among the lyrics, what a noble poem is *Tropic Rain*, with its leaping measures, its onomatopoeic effects, and, more than all, its brave resolution to see good in evil, blenching at naught. That final stanza surely is one of the most satisfying, most uplifting in verse of our time :

“And methought that beauty and terror are only one,
not two ;
And the world has room for love and death and
thunder and dew ;
And all the sinews of Hell slumber in summer air ;
And the face of God is a rock, but the face of the
rock is fair.
Beneficent streams of tears follow the finger of pain,
And out of the cloud that smites beneficent rivers of
rain.”

Or look at *Mater Triumphans*, a superb thing of a verity, destined to thrill mothers many like a trumpet-blast. The whole epic of maternity is expressed in those two stanzas, and the resonance of the words carries with it the mother-pride in offspring conquering all weakness, pain, and fear. In *The Woodman* Stevenson's sense of the might of nature and the impudent meddling of man, self-elected lord of natural phenomena, — a sentiment also finely expressed in prose in *The Vailima Letters*, — is embodied in a poem containing much strong, picturesque description and an underlying sermon on struggle as the one great law of all existence. Everything preys on everything else, he says, and man must do likewise. This is the sterner side of his appreciation of the

century's creed of the survival of the fittest. The realization at times weighs him down. Yet, following Huxley's suggestion that man must combat, not imitate, the cosmic process, Stevenson's doctrine more often is that of gentleness and love. In his most inspired moods and utterances he yearns for a solution leaving room for a belief in the good. This comes out superbly in what is, to my mind, the greatest poem of the group, and one that Browning alone can rival. *If This were Faith* is indeed Browningesque in its rugged power, its splendidly nervous lilt, its intense ethical quality. The pathos of it is piercing; it reveals the intellectual attitude and the spiritual state of one of the thoughtfulest, bravest, honestest of the chiefs of literature. In spite of having seen God's

"evil doom
In Golgotha and Khartoum,"

he hopes that the resolve to play a soldier's part, the will to cling on to

"The half of a broken hope for a pillow at night,
That somehow the right is the right
And the smooth shall bloom from the rough,"

is enough for justification, even if faith can no farther go in the face of the seeming triumph of anti-Christ. The irresistible, vibrant sweep of the stirring cry shows it came hot from the heart, and among spiritual registrations in verse it must have a high place. There are other notable things—*The Lost Occasion*, *He Hears with Gladdened Heart the Thunder*, and the final *Evensong*, instinct with a tranquil resignation, a “twilight piece,”—among these late poems, with what may be called the “essential Stevenson” in them. Premonitions of the end come frequently during the last year, but, in spite of the wish, when the mood was on him, to revisit friends and the homeland, with the feeling that it were good to lie there, once at least it came to him that his Samoan isle was no ill abiding-place for his body. In reading *An End of Travel*, with its striking fifth line, one is comforted that he had the journey-end herein imagined and limned in lovely verse:

“Let now your soul in this substantial world
Some anchor strike. Be here the body moored;
This spectacle immutably from now
The picture in your eye; and when time strikes,

And the green scene goes on the instant blind,
 The ultimate helpers, where your horse to-day
 Conveyed you, dreaming, bear your body dead."

It must be a solace to every true lover of Stevenson that in his case the green scene did, literally, go on the instant blind, so that he and his were spared the droning misery of a long sickness.

The world will not let die such imaginative writing as is contained in this precious addendum to the verse of Robert Louis Stevenson. Noble literature it is, and very revelatory of the man, intensely autobiographic. The poems make clearer the good fight he fought, the captain he was, true to his own exhortation :

"bid me play
 The hero in the coming day !"

VI

Coelum non animum. To change one's sky is not to change one's mind about Stevenson or his work. This meditation upon him was begun amidst the hustle and roar of a great city. The tragic cries of newsboys hawking war "extras" ruffled the hours. As if in consonance with

political events, the skies were sullen, the weather had a bleak, untimely countenance. All was unrest, struggle, dubiety. I finish it in the divine promise of a soft, bright May day far up in the New Hampshire hill-country. The tender spring-green is on bush and tree, the air odorous with budding things. But, tested here or there, Stevenson's power abides: he is not for a certain mood or environment alone. The full appreciation of him is an esoteric matter: granted. One can laud his technic and admit his gifts, yet leave the choicest unsuspected. On the other hand, if admiration errs it also testifies to power. The use of superlatives in critical appreciation has a sort of justification; for the superlative is but the positive degree of the emotions. Yet it would seem to a contemporary that there is in him something of the classic, by virtue of which he is likely to persist as an author of unfading attraction. For he has offered two most acceptable hostages to Time: an impeccable art and a character piquant, wholesome, distinctive, and strong.

The Democratic and Aristocratic in Literature

THE DEMOCRATIC AND ARISTOCRATIC IN LITERATURE



I

IT is one of Time's curious paradoxes that poetry, originally most popular and democratic of literary products, should come to be regarded as farthest removed from common interest and apprehension. In the history of all peoples the dawn of the artistic expression gives us folk-made epics; and ballads, which are epics in little, are sung by the untutored and the illiterate of the race. Homer, Beowulf, the Norse Sagas and Eddas, the German Hildebrand, the Finnish Kalevala, are not the work of the self-conscious *litterateur* armed cap-a-pie with technique and appealing to an audience limited to those of somewhere the same degree of culture. Nay, rooting in the dance and the real music of instruments, testifying to the universal love of story-telling and for

rhythmic intervals, these earlier monuments are no more literary, in the modern sense, than was Pippa when morning-glad she carolled her dew-pearl of a lyric.

Many of these old poems, indeed, were not for centuries written down, and so were not literary in the derivational meaning of the word. The idea of the written song and story is a secondary one, and in a way unfortunate, obscuring, as it does, the thoroughly popular origin of these people-births. Professor Jebb notes this in respect of Greek poetry. "Writing," he says, "was indeed the instrument by which the poems were preserved and transmitted. . . . But it belonged to the very essence of all the great poetry that it appealed to hearers rather than to readers. The Greeks of the classical period were eager listeners and talkers; they delighted in lively conversation and subtle discussion, but they were not great students of books. What they felt in regard to the poet can be best understood by comparing it with the feeling which not they alone, but all people, have in regard to the orator and the preacher." This will take some superficial students of the noblest litera-

ture of antiquity with surprise; yet it is not only true of Greece, but of all early literatures.

"Poetry is the mother-tongue of man," said a great German critic; and the remark is far less figurative than at first appears. Every child, with its fondness for Mother Goose jingles and wonder-tales, reminds the thoughtful man of the childhood of the race, when ratiocination was not, and song was more natural than syllogism. Emotional speech (and poetry *par excellence* comes under the rubric) antedates the more intellectual, non-emotional speech of man by centuries, each nation following a universal law of evolution and developing its literature in accordance therewith. It is with this in mind that Sir Philip Sidney blames those who "inveigh against Poetry," because they "seek to deface that which in the noblest nations and languages that are known hath been the first light-giver to ignorance, and first nurse, whose milk little by little enabled them to feed afterwards of tougher knowledges."

Nobody would deny that our Anglo-Saxon forefathers were in manner of life, and because of their stage of development,

a practical, utilitarian folk. Yet the Old English bard who stood in the hall and, harp at breast, chanted the hero-deeds of the king was a personage hardly second in importance to the chief himself. He was not regarded by the men of the clan, the retainers in their armor gathering about the scald to hearken and hear his song, as a moonstruck, effeminate individual, to be tolerated at the best—patronized rather than approved. Contrariwise, his place of honor was assured, his position enviable for its emoluments and distinction. The direct and cogent effect of his appeal upon those rough warriors, feasting after their fight, was well understood; the bard stirred them to prowess, and was the expression of their battle-field deeds and aspirations. The most matter-of-fact weapon-men would, we may suppose, never have dreamed of questioning the poet's function in this sort, or of belittling his profession and place in their social life. His relation thereto was as immediate as was the blacksmith's; while his rank was such as to give him exceptional dignity and prominence.

Poetry, as Vico declared, was the first

form of wisdom—the wisdom that was felt and imagined, not thought and reasoned; hence the poet was not the dreamer so much as the sage and interpreter of the people to the people—a democratic function, and one to be comprehended by all. The modern attitude, popular if not critical, toward verse—we prefer to dub in this dubious fashion all present-day product which has not through fame been adjudicated the rank of poetry—is to be explained, first by the fact that reasoned thought, not emotional thought, is generally regarded as the vehicle for the conveyance of wisdom; and second, by the false distinction set up by the tyranny of the written and later the printed word, making rhythm and rhyme the business of the cultured few, and adjuncts of thought and feeling unrelated to the popular mind and heart. It is not unnatural that as society becomes civilized, with the birth of institutions, the division of occupations, and the rise of reflective differentia in all directions, incidental to a more self-conscious and sophisticated age, intellectual processes and results should come to be regarded as of more authority and value

than emotional states and the spontaneous product of feeling. In truth, this slow shift of ideal is always the condition and the measure of natural evolution into higher social life. Yet it may be that in the course of time, when reflection threatens to swamp creation, it is fitting to call a halt — to remind a people *blasé* with the consciousness of the mechanism of all things that the disestimation of man's natural, emotive side is dangerous, and can be carried too far; it may choke great creative efforts, hush the divine sound of song. Nay, it may further be said that the modern world is now in a mood to react in favor of spontaneity; sick of the fetish-worship of mere intellect, it gladly welcomes the childlike qualities of the unsophisticate heart. The present craze for folk-poets, voicing in the language of the commonalty the popular needs and ideals, makes for this conclusion; so too does the diligent study of the people songs and ballads of Europe and the East. Modern psychological research leads the same way, teaching that the emotions of humanity play a larger part, and a more fruitful, in our growth than the mere intellectuals, and are of more ancient lineage.

One recalls Lecky's deep line, "We owe more to our illusions than to our knowledge." It is the very man surfeited with philosophy, science, and history who flies to poetry for a breath of the glad, young, irresponsible dawn of the world. And so, mayhap, by learning the true place and power of song and the true validity of instinct, all classes may be brought back to a realization of its democratic nature. It has been overlooked that the true barrier which divides humble from high, the illiterate from the *litterati*, is not such a naïve child of feeling as Poetry, but the stern, cold younger brother, Ratiocination. Thought is essentially aristocratic; emotion is democratic the globe over; one touch of nature makes the whole world kin. And song, above everything else, is the direct and impulsive issue of emotion. If the arbitrary and accidental nature of literature — meaning thereby the *written* word — once be securely lodged in mind, the truth as to the royal yet popular part played by the emotions in instinctive creation will be more widely apprehended.

Yet how surely is literature, as thus ex-

plained, a people-product, still capable, however much it may have been appropriated by the select and made to seem almost a caste privilege, of being a joy to all; how surely is poetry, most plebeian of literary divisions in birth and upbringing, a form to-day for the most unreserved and general acceptance, if the world but will; the hard-and-fast line which marks off the literary from common folk and common interests is an artificial one.

This misconception of literature in general, and of verse in particular, is to be overcome mainly in two ways: by a broader and more wholesome appeal to humanity on the part of the makers of literature; and by the cultivation of their emotional and imaginative natures by the so-called practical community. The blame of the present state of things certainly lies with the *litterateurs* themselves in some measure. A movement like that of the French Symbolist school of poets tends to beget the impression that poetry is a vague, unrelated maundering of sound, color, and suggestion in language, utterly outside of the realities of life. "Take a few adverbs, conjunctions, prepositions, substan-

tives, and adjectives," says a distinguished French singer of another and nobler school, "shake them all up together, and you will have symbolism;" and this is hardly an exaggeration of some of the recent work done under that name. It has been a fashion in more than one country to deem literature meritorious in exact proportion as it was recondite, obscure, precious, or narrow. Let literature become exclusive or technical, and the breath of life goes out of it, whatever the temporary activity into which it may be galvanized. No one can wonder that plain people are given pause before the meaningless rhythmic rhapsodies of Swinburne or the occult mysticism of a Mallarmé; it would be an egregious mistake to fly to the conclusion that such folk are atrophied on the side of emotional literature. On the contrary, they will be quick to respond to the poem or story which has clear thought, true feeling, and a sane atmosphere. The trouble with much of current verse is, that it substitutes empty art, or metaphysics, or specialization, or the hyper-refinements of a finicky, lop-sided culture for the wholeness and heartiness of more natural

conditions. It is safe to say that if our writers cultivate a sound habit of body and a pure habit of mind, these abuses and effeminacies which bring their art into ill-repute, and surely make misunderstandings, will die from disuse. A sick man in literature, who lets his sickness get into his work, is not a boon, but a nuisance. Meet the age half way, O man of letters; realize the dignity and breadth of your calling; reckon it as manly to be nothing less than vital and vigorous in your work, eschewing the night-side of your craft as too pathological for humanity's profit or your own well-being! So will you have done your part, and may rest from your labors satisfied that your talent has not been wasted, and sure that your generation will not be thankless.

But on the side of the public, too, there is a duty. This may be expressed by saying that common folk (and the world in general makes no pretence to be outside this category) must cultivate the higher-practical; the practical which ministers to the heart and soul, and so to nobler living, while it may be impractical so far as material and immediate gain is concerned.

People at large favor appeals to their psychical natures ; they enjoy stories, songs, scenery, art which reproduces and idealizes all that side of life. Scratch a Christianized Turk, it is said, and you will find a Mohammedan ; scratch a practical man, and you will find a big boy responsive to the things of the spirit, though maybe ashamed to own it. Hence the men and women for whom sound, pure-hearted literature is written are, as a rule, quite ready to meet it half way. They must not be slow to encourage what is given them of sweet and inspirational ; nor must they be tricked into the fallacious modern notion that emotion is puerile and waste time, that intellectual wrestling is the most glorious outcome of latter-day development. So far is this last from being true that all genuine culture (as contradistinguished from knowledge) is a thing of the emotional and imaginative parts of human consciousness. Some other modern nations — the Germans, for example — are nearer the right in their frank avowment of the worth of sentiment and the prominence in daily life they give to music — above all other arts offspring of the

feelings. A public, a people, which does not count as ill spent an hour stolen from the workaday world to listen to a symphony concert or a reading from the poets is the only fruitful environment for the artist in all those arts which are indissolubly bound by the kin-tie of creative emotion. Withdraw the audience, and the makers of art and literature fatten on their own idiosyncrasies, become decadent, symbolic, or whatever be the descriptive phrase naming the fad of the fleeting day. With these inter-relations between poetry and the public realized, with the democratic birth of the former set before the eyes and brought home to the consciousness by argument and illustration, it should not be Utopian to hope for a reinvestiture of verse in the suffrages, not of a class, but of a people, the result being greater joyance and a swifter progress in the ameliorations and upliftings of our civilization.

II

There is always a reverse side to human shields: we must touch this topic in another aspect ere we leave it. While the fact of

democratic origin and the popular nature of literature and of its highest division, verse, is perfectly true and in need of reiteration, it happens, nevertheless, that it is possible to lay too much stress upon the naïve folk-element in letters, to the obscuration of truth. At times, and especially in an over-cultured and reflective age, a sort of preciosity is thrown around a literary people-product, and the suppressed premise appears to be a belief that all virtue lies in the haphazard outcome of non-literary and careless workers in a primitive art. That the breath of life is often in such work, and absent from the polished efforts of self-conscious poetasters and essay-mongers may be readily conceded; but it is not the less a fact that art is long, a slow, tortuous evolution moving from crude to perfect, and from the childishly, monotonously simple to the fascinatingly complex. Its latter end is better than its first.

The earlier and more artless product of a given nation, it must be borne in mind, has a dual value, to be separated carefully into its component parts in any fruitful analysis. First, there is its historical significance, calling for our appreciation as a

link in a chain, or as a comparatively unimportant parent of a greater offspring. And then, second, there is its value as literature *per se*, aside from all question of evolutionary place and importance in a line of causation. Too often these tests are confused, and much cloudy or wild criticism results. For example: the immense amount of research and critical judgment which have been expended upon the ballad forms of their older native literatures, by English and German scholars respectively, is right and proper when the historic position of the ballad is in view, but would be almost absurd if the investigation were for literary excellence alone; and, in consequence, one notices a fetish worship of these rough, amorphous attempts at song and narration, among people who ignore the merits of modern work in the same *genre* infinitely superior in all particulars which go to make poetry.

The story of the modern attitude toward the Elizabethan drama is again an illustration. For a while it was neglected as rude and contemptible; even the appreciation of a Dryden or a Pope being touched with the condescension of one viewing the

product from a superior height. But with the present century we get a truer *aperçu*, and the play-making of Shakespeare and his fellows is hailed as the Golden Age of our native drama. In the superlatives of praise now deemed proper for the latter-day critic in treating of this product lurks a peril for those who read as they run, and perhaps for the critic-class itself. Those who take their opinions at second-hand will conclude that because the greatest poetry of our tongue was written by the matchless Shakespeare, by Marlowe of the mighty line, sweet-toned Ford, mournful Webster, and the rest of the seventeenth-century immortals, — because their dramatic output is constantly and critically referred to as standing by itself, the chief glory of our native literature, — therefore the best play-making in our literary history was done between the days of Elizabeth and the second James. And this conclusion would be an egregious mistake. As literature, that virile and flamboyant product is doubtless above all else before and since; but as drama regarded as a form distinct from other forms, and having a technique of its own, the later work of Sheridan and Gold-

smith, say, or far more that of Ibsen, is superior by an infinity of stage-craft and technical art. Yet so loosely has the unbounded laudation of the Elizabethans been construed that even this statement, precise as to fact and mild in manner, may seem to some whimsical or iconoclastic. Great as imaginative literature, great indeed as drama when compared with the precedent miracles and mysteries, horse-farce and stilted classicalities, out of which it evolved, the plays of Shakespeare and his mates are not good in the sense and to the degree that those of Sardou, Ibsen, Pinero, and Sudermann are good. In the evolution of the play as an organic form in literature, these later men stand on a vantage-ground and are of the sort to make use of it. We have here, in short, the confusion arising from the subtle power exercised by a mighty, but relatively inartistic art-product, to which is imputed a vicarious virtue by reason of youth and unsophistication ; because it is more "spontaneous," less consciously articulated. Had Shakespeare, it is said, weighed and pruned and filed his figures, we should have had fewer pleonasms and euphuisms

perchance, but less authentic raptures as well. The fallacy of the folk-cult is here, though in modified form. Shakespeare, the Elizabethans at large, were great literary creators and at times great artists; and their most pronounced triumphs will be found to be at one inevitably with their truest art—a significant fact. It is unphilosophic to deify the untutored side of their power as if therein lay the secret of all its potency and charm.

That there is a popular quality, a wild, natural music, in much of the early effort in the literary evolution of a race cannot be gainsaid. At the same time, this simple truth may be—nay, is—elevated into a doctrine, with the result of blinding us to relative excellencies, and putting a more developed and finer art under a cloud. Literature, one must be ever repeating, is an art primarily and chiefly; it is extremely doubtful if the songs and ballads of the most unsophisticate age which history records were the output of pure inspiration, with no thought of manner or form. Merely because we fall in with a cruder product does not at all prove spontaneity: it indicates only that the art

is less defined and positive; the inspiration is a matter for subjective tests. Many early literatures, once ranked as crude and undeveloped, now are known to be thoroughly artistic: thus, it used to be a stock remark in text-books of English literature to call the Anglo-Saxon poetry rough and barbarous. To-day every student of it is aware that it is highly evolved and consciously artistic. A milk-maid may labor more over a doggerel quatrain bearing the smutted finger-marks of folk-verse than a trained poet over his sonnet, which by grace of long experience he writes with no restricting sense of its intricacies of construction. No sudden gust of creative energy will overcome ignorance in manipulating unfamiliar material. An easy pitfall, this; and, we venture to think, one into which many ballad-idolaters have fallen.

To begin with, then, crudeness and spontaneity are not synonyms. Next, since art is an organic evolution taking on new beauties and decorations in its course of development, it is fair to say that, even conceding an increase in self-consciousness, the gains far outweigh the losses, and are

to be rejoiced over, not neglected for indulgence in a retrospective wail over a more or less illusory primitive quality, which when analyzed resolves itself into two parts dross to one of true metal. The permanently great art of the nations has not been the rough-hewn, impulsive efforts of demi-civilized creatures, but the wise and splendid product—inspirational, yet sternly law-abiding and artistic—of the aristocrats of letters—those to the purple born. Homer was not a lawless maker of poems, but a consummate craftsman; so was Dante, so also Shakespeare; Goethe and Heine, Musset and Hugo, Keats and Tennyson,—none of these lacked spontaneity, inspiration; but they were artists *ad unguem*. No fallacy is more irritating to one familiar with the exigencies and demands of art than that which fondly fancies that inspiration spells a total lack of training and a tyro's spurt of commonplace self-expression. Editors are aware, to their daily sorrow, of the type of contributor who sends his first attempt for publication with the assurance that it was "inspired," penned under compulsion in the mid-watches of the night, a thing

unique in the writer's experience. The one sure and changeless family-trait of all such writing is its worthlessness; and some at least of the poetic seizures of the past, dubbed wonderful because so delightfully free from self-conscious effort, belong to this same category.

It is well, then, to have two denotements in mind concerning art: that in its finest and richest forms it implies training, technique, evolution, and must be, therefore, in a sense, self-knowing and self-judging; and again, that the moment of creation is the moment of inspiration with Goethe and Tennyson as with Master Ballad-Monger. Moreover, inspiration for inspiration, that of the trained and rounded artist will be to that of the uncultured songman as gold to pinchbeck. The worst feature, in sooth, of this pseudo-worship of folk-literature is its affectation. The refined critic, who goes into spasms of admiration over the halting stanzas and bizarre metaphors of some bygone lyric, is more often than not keenly alive to all that makes art precious and distinctive: he forces himself into enthusiasm here, rather than honestly feels it;

he has a tradition of eulogium on his neck, like an Old Man of the Sea. And so he praises out of all proportion, and ignores the gracious gains and enrichments of contemporaneous art. No one well read in, and appreciative of, the best modern English verse can have to do with the early English ballads without frequent irritation and a sense of manifold, sometimes of amazing, defects, and this despite much pleasure and stimulation. And since honesty is the beginning of all wisdom, in literary apperception as elsewhere, it is well to make this point pike-staff plain.

So the two sides of the matter emerge from our to-and-fro of argument and illustration. We see (it may be hoped) the wrong in deeming literature aristocratic in the sense that it is exclusive, unsympathetic to common needs and common moods, the trick of the specialist and nothing more,—this view overlooking the unliterary, democratic genesis of all literature, and especially of poetry, its first and fairest child. But we see too, in seeming though not essential contradiction to this, that litera-

ture is an art like any other; that the people-made song or story is a simpler, cruder, less artistic thing than the perfected lyric, novel, or play into which it shall in the course of centuries be developed; and that a false cult of the raw for its rawness' sake may easily spring up and work mischief. With both of these truths understood and applied, the student, the reader, the amateur, or the literary worker is in a position to be tolerant, yet keen — broadly appreciative, yet genuinely critical. He will feel that literature should be and can be a general joy, not a privilege of the select few; and he will rejoice in good literature, whether early or late, whether the ballad made in the morning of history or the psychologic marvel of a modern master. Only he will graduate all literary production according to its kind and degree of excellence, and will ever discriminate between faddish fashions and the eternal verities of Art.

Phases of Fiction

1

I

THE PREDOMINANCE OF THE NOVEL



WHEN a certain division of literature is, for historical reasons, dominant in current literary production, it is like a drag-net which ensnares divers sorts of fish. It attracts not only the natural makers in that form, but others whose gifts fit them better for some other work, but who cannot resist the centripetal pull of this most popular activity. Thus, in the Elizabethan days the drama was the type of literature which represented the age, most interested the public, and consequently engaged the main attention of the begetters of literary masterpieces. And hence it is that we meet with men like Peele, Greene, and Lodge, and, later, Cartwright and Shirley, whose call to play-making was not imperative, whose work was more or less imitative. Had the

mode of the day in letters demanded the essay or the novel, they would as readily have turned in those directions. Peele was naturally a superior controversialist, Lodge could write so exquisite a prose pastoral as *Rosalind*, — whence Shakespeare drew his lovely *As You Like It*, — and Shirley had powers as a lyrist exemplified in so dainty a song as that entitled "*A Lullaby*."

At present the novel is the all-engulfing literary form. Alphonse Daudet has asked of late: "What shall be the novel, the literature, of the future?" — as if the two terms were co-terminous and interchangeable. Fiction has made sad inroads upon the ancient and honorable champaign of Poetry; the essay is as naught to it in popularity and applause; while even the stern historian tries to give his chronicle of the past, of "old, unhappy far-off things," a narrative interest, and some boldly throw their history into the guise of an historical romance, albeit their purpose is not artistic, but didactic, — the imparting of knowledge rather than the giving of pleasure. Fiction, in short, is the modern magnet toward which all literary product and power

are drawn. That this predominance is in some ways an evil (despite the indisputable virtues of the novel), that it is possibly fraught with danger to general literary production, is a thesis which will at least bear further amplification.

The injury done to poetry has been alluded to. When Walter Scott, after triumphing in narrative and ballad verse, took up the writing of romances and charmed all Europe, he gave English fiction an importance and dignity hardly enjoyed by it before. Without overlooking Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's testimony that Richardson's *Pamela* wrung tears from the chambermaids of all nations, it is pretty safe to say that with the *Waverley* Novels our fiction, as a distinct form, gained a prestige which, in spite of fluctuations and what at present some incline to call a woful devolution, it has never lost. And verse has suffered a proportionate decay of authority. It has come to pass that verse-men adopt a semi-apologetic tone in putting forth their wares, and the *soi-disant* scientific spirit of the age tends to look askance at such activity. To be sure, this indifference to poetry

may easily be exaggerated. If the critic go back to any earlier period of English poetry, much the same influences may be detected: the poets themselves timid and knee-supple; their carping judges aghast at the dearth of good work, and with their mouths full of praise of some previous day. Walter Scott's accent in speaking of *The Lady of the Lake*, before its publication, has, for us, a curiously tentative and deprecatory sound. And to read to-day such a critique as Peacock's *Four Ages of Poetry*, wherein not Scott alone, but Lord Byron, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey are dismissed with contemptuous paragraphs, is sufficiently amusing, while suggestive of the irresistible tendency to belittle the foreground in favor of the historical perspective — a strange reversal of the ordinary laws of composition. But aside from all this, it is true enough that contemporaneous poetry is, speaking broadly, tolerated rather than appraised; if the text of sales be applied, the comparatively small editions of verse — the regular edition being 500 volumes, and limited editions of less size being a fad of the time — show the same thing,

from the publisher's sober point of view. Look, too, at the relative value set on fiction and verse in the magazines, those faithful registers of popular taste. The story is the *sine quâ non*, the one literary form which must be supplied; the quatrain or sonnet is tucked in to fill unseemly gaps between articles. Its function is that of a tail-piece. In the days of good Queen Bess, poetry in play form was the acceptable mode of literary expression: there was then a happy conjunction of public demand and artistic supply, though whether they stood in the relation of cause and effect is matter for parley. But so much may be roundly affirmed: what the play was to that time, the novel is to this. Those now writing verse must expect and be content with smaller sales, slower reputation, and, in a sense, an uncongenial environment. As a result, the fictional maelstrom sucks in some who in another day would have been poets, or who, having the name of poets, would have done greater work in verse than will ever come from them under existing conditions. It is a curious query, What might Kipling have achieved

in poetry in an age which made the poetic drama the recognized mode of expression? This, with two or three of his fine ballads in mind, to say nothing of the dramatic instinct in his fiction, is not so superficial a suggestion as might at first appear. But born into these latter-day conditions, he is an Uhlan of story-telling, who only now and then makes a side-charge into the placid domains of Poesy.¹

Fiction, again, draws the natural essayist away from his *metier*. Those heretical enough to prefer the essay-work of Henry James to his novels will think of him in this connection; a humorist like Mark Twain, undoubtedly a teller of tales, but hardly a novelist in the full modern content of the word, is another exemplar. The cult of the analytic in fiction has led many writers, whose forte lay in such effects rather than in synthetic creation, into novel-making; and, conversely, perhaps the analytic tendency has been thus exaggerated, until it has culminated in The Story-That-Never-Ends. Interesting questions and cross-questions arise

¹ This was written, of course, before Kipling's full fame as a poet had come.

here. But the main contention, that this modern maelstrom, with its secret undertow, has drawn the essayists into its potent circle, to the impoverishment of the essay — delightful form made luminous by the names of Montaigne, Lamb, Heine, and Arnold — and, as well, to the dubious improvement of Fiction itself, is for easy apprehension. Recently, and in large part due to the brilliant critical papers of such English and American writers as Pater, Stevenson, Moore, Lang, and Repplier, a reaction in favor of the essay is observable, and it may be that this will grow into a veritable renaissance. So far, however, it is little more than a beginning. That the reading of the older and standard essayists has been checked by the novel and its half-breed ally, the newspaper, cannot be gainsaid.

But regarding Fiction alone, what are the effects of this autocracy which it maintains in the world of literature? To our thinking, we get bad novels, and too many of them, because of it. The form has so supreme a power, and the emoluments are so glittering, that those who have it in them to do good work lash themselves to

unnatural exertions in order to answer the demand, and sell their second best in lieu of their best, which takes more time. Very few of our modern novel-writers exhibit the conscientious care and leisurely method of Mrs. Ward or Stevenson. The temptation is great and the danger extreme. And far worse than this, a horde of hangers-on rush into the field, and by their antics, utterly lacking coherence, with no *raison d'être* to justify their presence, bring what is a gift, an art, and a consecrated labor, into misunderstanding and disrepute. It is fast coming to the point where a man who has not written a novel gains thereby a certain distinction; and this surely is ominous for the highest interests of Fiction. But it is questionable if the novel will remain indefinitely the dominant type, the maelstrom engulfing the various kinds of literary power and activity. All analogy points the other way, begetting a presumption in favor of some new form or the revival of an old. It is not impossible that with a new impulse in poetry of the narrative or dramatic order, Fiction will find its elder sister occupying her sometime place as a coequal.

Indeed, the forecast for the drama, uniting as it does the most splendid creative literary energy with action of the most direct and universally appealing kind, is especially bright. And the literary movement in this direction of late suggests an ultimate shifting in the relative importance of those forms of literary expression which in our day engage the interest and affection of men.

II

THE PERSISTENCE OF THE
ROMANCE

The now palpable reaction from the realistic, so called, in English fiction to the romantic, as a form and a method, suggests an historical retrospect. The fact is, the romance, in its several kinds, has persisted for centuries in our native novel, and its resurgence to-day is only a demonstration to be prophesied from past experiences in fictional evolution. Nor is the explanation far to seek. All the world loves a story, as it does a lover; and psychologic interest, the analysis of motive and character, will never take the place of that objective interest which centres in action, situation, and *dénouement*. Our age takes more kindly to such methods and motives than did its predecessors; indeed, it has been taught to do so, and the novel of subjective tendency may be styled the chosen vehicle of expression. But always those who read as they run, and

the more critical class which seeks in books illusion from the workaday world, will desire the adventure story and the heroic presentment of human life. A host of people agree with Balzac that the writer of fiction should strive to portray society not solely as it is, but as it is hoped it will be in that "possibly better" state suggested by present improvement. One is struck by this in the simple inductive process of inquiry among intelligent book-lovers; the present writer has found that a large proportion go to novels for rest and recreation, rather than for a criticism of life or æsthetic stimulation, least of all for spiritual profit. If this last is to result, let it be unobtrusive, by way of indirection, not through the avowed *tendenz* fiction, seems to be the cry.

Text-books are fond of emphasizing the birth of the modern analytic novel with Richardson and Fielding, as if thereafter the whole trend were toward the subjective social study. It is true enough that a new impulse and manner were introduced by those worthies; but twenty odd years before *Pamela*, and *Tom Jones*, De Foe's *Robinson Crusoe* was in the

field to represent that undying creature, the Romance; and if Mr. Kipling and Mr. Stevenson, Mr. Hall Caine, Dr. Doyle, and General Wallace hark back to the seamy Daniel as prototype, he in turn derives from the picaresque tales that had gone before, and, to look to origins, is justified by the Spanish fictionists from whom our romance sprang. An early English example of the picaresque is Nash's *Jack Wilton*, which, clumsy as it is, and naïvely childish to modern taste, does nevertheless explain De Foe on the one hand and the penny-dreadful on the other. Jack, a page in the English army in France at the siege of Tournay, and a fellow of infinite gusto, much travel, and many escapades, is perhaps the first picturesque rascal in a *genre* to be afterwards enriched by Dumas and broadened and modified by Le Sage, Hugo, Scott, and Dickens. He is the father of harum-scarums, and he initiates for all time the type of the picaresque story — that division of the romance the essence of which lies in brisk, breathless adventuring and a lusty enjoyment of life as incident and spectacle. Such later divisions, of course,

as the pastoral romance — early exemplified in Lyly's *Euphues* and Sidney's *Arcadia*, and finding its modern representation in Mr. Black, Mr. Blackmore, and others — and the bombastic pseudo-romance borrowed from the French of Scarron *et Cie.*, and — thank Heaven! — pretty much dead to-day, swell with contributory streams the now stately river of romance. But the adventure-tale that eventuates in *Kidnapped* and *The Refugees* is to be tracked down to *Jack Wilton*, artless product of Elizabethan times.

Nor, if we overlook the mere matter of prose-form, may we hesitate to go farther back in looking for the genesis of the spirit and purpose of the English romance. We shall meet with it several centuries earlier, in that sterling, sturdy literary form, the ballad; in certain of the verse narratives of Chaucer; yes, in the Old English epics themselves. Other times, other customs, and saga, epic, apologue, ballad, or novel may be the chosen vehicle; but the liking for *story* is a constant factor. The instinct for romance is the instinct for illusion, a request for pictures of a livelier and lovelier world than that we live in; it were fool-

ish not to expect its gratification in art all along in the development of our literature. With this continual outcropping, this cyclic persistence, of the romance in English fiction, notable contributions in this kind may be anticipated in the near future, as a rebound from the deification of the psycho-analytic. The public is eager for it (apply the test of sales in the case of recent prominent romantic novels); and the writers of fiction take heart for the attempt, or by a natural resilience are of the tribe of Dan. But whether the movement produce marvels of romantic composition this decade or the next century, it is safe to say that the field will always be cultivated, appealing as it does to a permanent taste and satisfying an inevitable hunger. By no means is it to be said that the school of Messrs. Howells and James is in its decadence; fruitful and important work is sure to come thence, and its possibilities, especially in the domain of psychology, are as yet but half realized. But it is well to bear down on the fact that the pedigree of this school is no better than, is indeed not so old and honorable as, that which has De Foe as past master in the last

century, and is vigorously championed in *fin de siècle* English letters by Messrs. Kipling and Stevenson.

And it should be understood that this reaction toward incident in fiction is a phase of the wider protest against the abuse of that misnamed realism for which partialism is a fitter term. It is part of a tendency which has produced in Paris, the stronghold of the opposite influence, a revival denominated neo-idealism, resulting in symbolism in poetry and M. Wagner's noble trumpet-call to the young generation. Romanticism is to idealism in the novel what the garment is to the soul. In this broader implication, the romance includes Mrs. Ward's *David Grieve* and Mrs. Hunt's *Ramona*, books treating life in its more ideal aims and relations. The romance of the future will present such high interests, keeping pace with the evolution of society; and its vantage-ground over the romance of years ago will be that it is firm-based on truth to the phenomena of life, and is thus, in the only true sense, realistic. Nobler in content and persistent in type, the romance, broadly

viewed, may be regarded as that form of literature which more than any other shall reflect the aspirations of the individual and the social progress of the State.

III

NOVELS AND NOVEL-READERS



Just as the term *father* implies the correlative term *child*, so does a novel imply a novel-reader. It were hard to imagine a piece of fiction without an audience, even if the audience number but one and be furnished by the author himself. Readers, then, being necessary, it touches the quick of the fictionist's interest to inquire: What is the attitude of the present-day patrons of tales towards the different kinds of fiction purveyed for their delectation? Is the purpose-novel preferred, or the light and cynical analytic study, or the frankly objective adventure-tale of your true romanticist? Would Mrs. Ward win the popular plebiscite, or Mr. Benson, or Messrs. Stevenson, Doyle, and Weyman?

Of course a categorical reply could only be made on the basis of counting noses: the pure mathematics of the problem will always be out of reach. Still, what with the test of sales, the talk of society, and

the *a posteriori* analyses of the critics, an opinion of some solidity may be attained. The writer has made a point of conversing with all sorts of folk who care for fiction (and who, outside of the absolutely illiterate class, does not care for it?), and has been both interested and instructed by the testimony thus derived. Blending the illumination gained in this way with that from other sources, he has concluded that novel-readers may be divided, roughly, into three classes: first, those who care for fiction as art primarily, and get their main pleasure from its truth to life, its character analysis, and its construction; second, those whose interest centres in the thesis of the book, and who care little or nothing for form, style, and other distinctively literary features; and third, those to whom a novel is above all else a story—something to amuse and charm, an organism with movement and zest of life.

That division of novel-readers which looks for and relishes to the full the art of a bit of fiction is comparatively small, and for obvious reasons. Here belong the critics, the connoisseurs of literature. To such it matters not so much if a story be

pleasant, or whether or not it teaches sound morality and superinduces a better opinion of one's fellow-men. If it have construction, vital character-drawing, and verisimilitude, if it possesses stylistic distinction and dramatic power, they are satisfied. The analytic student of the novel comes in the course of time to put his attention on these things to the exclusion of everything extraneous; he reads more as a scientist and less as a human being. This is at once the privilege and the penalty of the critical function. It is only the very great books that can wrest him from this self-conscious and dubious coign of vantage and set him cheek by jowl with ordinary humanity, breathless in watching a piece of life and personally involved in the fortunes of the *dramatis personæ* — in the grip of the sweetest and strongest of obsessions. Such, as a rule, is the critic's place and state of mind. Not always, even in his case, however. Mr. Andrew Lang, suffering, one might almost say, from a surfeit of culture, likes nothing so well as the novel with "go" and color and life, contradistinguished from that of analysis and the mooting of problems. Conceiving the end

of art to be "pleasure, not edification," he makes a plea for "the Fijian canons of fiction," meaning thereby that those *naïve* natives in their stories "tell of gods and giants and canoes greater than mountains, and of women fairer than the women of these days, and of doings so strange that the jaws of the listeners fall apart." Mr. Lang, in short, is fond of beautiful impossibilities in a novel. But it is none the less fair to say that the critic-class, as such, reads with "Art for art's sake" perpetually engraven upon its censorious front. And it is also plain that the audience thus furnished the fictionist is so small as to be numerically contemptible, and in the vulgar matter of sales as unimportant as the *p* in pneumonia. To these professionals of criticism may be added a fraction of the reading public which uses their method, or in amateurish fashion, albeit honestly, follows in their wake. Very young persons whose education has been large and experience limited, and who for these reasons take themselves *au grand sérieux*, and are more or less self-conscious in their psychological habitudes, belong here; here belong, too, older, hardier, and

more sensible people of a natural intellectual keenness, the *ab ovo* analysts of life, and of literature as its expression. These swear by Mr. Howells' *dicta*, and, as to quality, are of the *aristoi* among readers, coveted by all genuine artists. But neither of these subsidiary classes swells the critic-class, caring for the art of a novel first of all, to proportions invalidating our claim that it is decidedly the smallest of the three, and, so far as immediate influence and the substantial return of figures is concerned, the least important.

The second and larger class embraces readers who object not to didactics in their novels. To them a polemic in the guise of literature is as acceptable as a pill, sugar-coated to the taste, to the thorough-going homœopathist. Many falling into this category enjoy literature *per se*, to be sure; but they like it also to convey some thoughtful thesis, preferring, so to say, the luxuriously cushioned barouche of fiction to wrestling with the same problem in the Irish jaunting-car of sociology or science. Hence is derived a good part of the audience rallying to the *Heavenly Twins* and *A Yellow Aster*; or that which a

few years ago took up arms for *Robert Elsmere*. A part, not the whole, we must repeat; because these *tendenzgeschichten*, as the Germans call them, are far more than mere preachments and special pleadings; often containing the vivid characterization of flesh-and-blood creatures, the one red drop of human life which is precious. But it is undeniable that the immense amount of talk evoked by such books had never been forthcoming, were they not a stage upon which to display the puppets of theory and argument. Right here opinions violently clash, and schools form as naturally as rocks crystallize. Plenty of earnest and honest devotees of the novel will have it that art and story interest may be supplied in a book, plus the presentation of some vital question of the day, adding by so much to its importance and attraction, and lifting fiction, traditionally regarded as a "light" division of literature, into a more legitimate place, until it ranks with serious (too often a synonym for dull) literature. It is, in fact, a literary cult, at the present writing, to be "serious" in the novel; as it was a social cult, during the recent panic, to be

poor. It was the book more painfully and self-consciously didactic than any other in English fiction within several years which provoked the most discussion — not critical controversy so much as the more powerful, unpredictable popular interest of society. The vogue and stimulation of Madame Grand's strong if unequal and inartistic essay in the field of social analysis were little short of phenomenal, although now, striking work in other sorts of fiction having since obscured it, one thinks of this study of the marital relation with Villon's refrain rising to the mind: "Where are the Snows of Yester-year?" For a season it is even likely that the believers in purpose-fiction outnumbered not only the critical minority already characterized, but also the old-fashioned followers of the healthier tale whom we are to reckon with under our third division. For a season only, however, we should guess; there is a sort of rabies of interest which destroys by its own violence, and already may be seen the after-effects of what has been cleverly dubbed the "woman revolt in fiction." Still, this interest, this excitement, if temporary, has its

significance, and goes to show that a wider and deeper appeal to humankind can be made through the novel, and will be made, — an appeal touching grave questions and the most sacred relations, — as perhaps through no other form of the written word. It will not do to sneer at tendency in literature as lying outside of critical attention. Terence's line applies to literature even as to life, and nothing in fiction that broadly stirs his fellow men and women can be alien to the true critic's function.

Yet it is plain, and to be plainly stated, that this popular furore over a dominant piece of purpose-fiction tends to obscure critical tests and canons. Those who read uncritically incline, under such influence, to judge a work by the amount of immediate noise and intelligent comment it begets, and as a consequence one hears absurdly exaggerated encomium. *The Heavenly Twins*, for example, is put on a par with *Marcella*; the truth being that beside Mrs. Ward's finished and masterful work of art, it is ill-constructed, false to life, faulty in drawing, and terribly diffuse — in fine, the journey-work of a brilliant novice. The interest awakened

by such a production is largely adventitious, because based on an appeal lying beyond artistic tests. It is well to have this clearly in mind here in the United States, where comparative criticism is but locally conceded, and where for this reason a stern insistence upon the criteria of artistic perfection is of all places most needed. It is not cause for complaint that a host of readers, the palpable majority of whom are women, welcome novels handling with more or less *elan* the relations of the sexes; the repression, by the Anglo-Saxon traditions of *convenance* in fiction, of all that side of social phenomena, results, as might be expected, in an excess of curiosity and excitement which have their morbid manifestations; but the residuum of all this ferment will be a broader outlook and a freer conception of *motifs*. If, however, we do not learn to apply rigidly and with malice prepense to any fiction whatsoever, man-made or woman-begotten, the universal rules of art, a parlous state is ours. That section of society which elects the purpose-novel as its special pet and pride may gratify its taste under promise to exempt none of this popular product from the

Rhadamanthian judgment by the which all fiction must be judged; and with the agreement to keep clearly dissevered in their own minds the appeal of art and the appeal of thought.

The readers of a more genial habit and a more traditional standard make up our third and final class. They care for a story for the story's sake, and, bothering not overmuch if its likeness to life be dubious, go so far as to open arms to a fine representation of the improbable. They stand by Balzac's phrase (rarely obeyed by the master himself) that the novelist should depict the world, not as it is, but as it may possibly become. And it is this sort of folk, we would contend, which on the whole is the best-balanced, the most humanistic, and, in the long run, the most influential among novel-readers. Mr. Howells inclines to condemn a species which, to his view, still loves the rattle and the woolly horse in literature. But if he, or any other seeker after truth, will pursue the Socratic method, conversing with fellow-mortals in the chance jostle of the social plexus, he will get evidence pushing towards our conclusion. The fact is that,

despite all our rather self-conscious prating about art, and notwithstanding our somewhat feverish enthusiasm over introspective social questions, the clear-headed and sound-hearted folk, who—thank Heaven!—are the warp of our social fabric, do not care to fret and fume for any such thing. They go to the novel for rest, amusement, illusion, as did the lovers of Thackeray and Dickens, of Scott and Dumas; as thousands again did in the case of *Trilby*, as true a child of the elder romanticists as was ever born. They have a deep-seated prejudice against fiction with a bad ending; so far from wishing to have a great book stamped indelibly on the mind at a first contact, they are glad to possess, as a cultivated reader expressed it to the writer, “the pleasant habit of forgetting a novel,” assuring additional delight in the event of re-perusal. “The world is two-thirds bad, I know,” says the *Advocatus diaboli* to the stickler for high art and serious purpose. “Your ‘realism’ teaches me nothing, it simply repeats unsavory and belittling facts of life; and I would have none of it. Give me lies rather than literalities, or, better yet, the half-truths of a scene

where the light is accented and the shadows put in corners — where they belong.” Now, this is unphilosophic perhaps, but it is natural and (*pace* Mr. Howells and those who jump with him) it is healthy, very. The trouble with the Howellsian view of fiction is that it is professional, and so not generally applicable. He is perfectly right — for himself.

But to argue *pro* and *con* as to this attitude of the readers who clamor for pleasant and incident-thronged novels, and who are the operative cause of the Romantic reaction we are now witnessing, is, after all, aside from our main line of argument. We are not justifying their position or attacking it: we would simply register the fact of their existence, and express the conviction that, while equal in intelligence and possibly excelling in common-sense either of the two other classes, they are to-day, and will be more surely to-morrow, the strongest in numbers, and thus for practical reasons are to be respectfully regarded by the maker of tales. Mr. Crawford, in his chapters on the *Art of Fiction*, insists that it is the novelist's primary

business to purvey amusement. The believers in romances have a sneaking sympathy with this position, though many of them would claim, and rightly, that along with the pleasure may go a noble stimulation of ideals affording that instruction, through the divine indirection of art, which is as far removed from didacticism as from the irresponsibility of the thorough-going realist. The advantage of those whose cry is all for illusion lies in their being in the line of a wholesome tradition, since men and women have gone more steadily to fiction for just that than for aught else; and, again, in their now perceptible and daily waxing in strength, a phenomenon due to the noticeable reaction, on the one side from the strained probing of psychologic problems, on the other from the art which substitutes form for substance and a quiescent pessimism for the cheerful bustle and vigor of red-blooded humankind. It is an audience to depend on in any age, this of the romance readers, and in quality such that the writer of fiction may well trust himself to deserve its plaudits; it is a constituency which he should hes-

itate to lose, even if there appear to be a temporary appetite for the morbid or the naturalistic. It is a backing which, year in and year out, will sell his books and establish his fame and make his copyright a valuable inheritance to his children.

IV PERMANENT TYPES IN MOD- ERN FICTION



The distinction of the modern novel — the novel of analysis deriving from Richardson and Fielding — is its emphasis of individual character. The fiction of incident and plot is much older, and is still lusty, showing, in fact, within the past few years, an efflorescence in adventure stories, the names of Stevenson, Kipling, Weyman, Doyle, Crockett, and Hope coming to mind. But since Richardson's *Pamela* the development of the novel of character has been rapid and rich in results, standing for the main tendency; even the so-called novel of incident — exemplified by some notable works of Stevenson — has had to pay some attention to analysis. The modern man is more subjective, and his fiction reflects the fact. In a great story that precedes by only a few years the analytic stories of Richardson and Fielding, as we have noted, the method is very

different. *Robinson Crusoe* is the adventure tale pure and simple; we are interested in the main character, not so much for himself as because of his unique position.

To think of permanent types of fiction, therefore, — with modern English literature mostly in view, — is, broadly speaking, to consider character; those men and women in stories whom we accept as alive, as real creations, and as typifying humanity.

One would say, *à priori*, that the creatures of fiction generally received as veritable examples of human nature must possess elemental qualities, and be recognized as flesh and blood like unto ourselves. I think that, as a generalization, this is true. Yet some famous creations are against the theory; Dickens' characters, for example. His folk confessedly are often not so much individuals as abstracts of some dominant trait or humor; they are not seldom caricature rather than portraiture. Yet what novelist's people are better known, have a more permanent place in affectionate memory?

This remark about Dickens puts us on the truth. We may be pretty sure of two

things about these permanent types — they are in some way attractive, and they are keenly realized by their begetter. Being actual to him, they are actual to us. And this is only another way of saying that they do, after all, set forth faithfully the traits — the foibles, errors, aspirations, sins, nobilities, ambitions, and sacrifices — of human beings. They typify something, they represent life. This is pre-eminently true of Dickens, with all his exaggeration. This typification may be of several kinds. First, the character may stand for a class. Thackeray's Penderennis is a type of the young English gentleman in his salad days; Dickens' Micawber, of the impecunious optimist; Howells' Silas Lapham, of the self-made American. Again, national as well as class characteristics may be displayed. This is true of Lapham, whom we recognize as indigenous. Tolstoy's Oblonsky, in *Anna Karénina*, is a typical Russian of the pleasure-loving, princely class; the hero of Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* is Slav as well as Nihilist, while Newman, in Henry James' *The American* (perhaps his best novel) has the ear-marks of a

Westerner of the States, his salient features in high relief against the European background. Or, once more, besides indicating class and nation in this way, they may also represent those deep abiding qualities of our common human nature that are elemental—that, allowing for all differences of time and country and culture, are permanent, found alike in Homer, in the Greek and the Elizabethan dramatists, in Cervantes, or in the modern social story. More than one of the protagonists just mentioned partake of this fundamental aspect. When a fiction writer creates in this way, broadly, humanly, with an unerring insight into the springs of action, local, national, general, he is great in his calling. I am inclined to think that, of all the story-makers in this century, Balzac comes nearest to doing this thing. The range, variety, depth, fineness, and strength of his performance are amazing. He saw the human comedy as a whole, and was acute enough to depict it by crowding his mighty canvas with French types, the types he knew best, which become, nevertheless, representative figures, aside from all racial limits. Were

not my special quarry American and English fiction, it were well to illustrate and expand as to Balzac.

A thoughtful English critic, himself a novelist, has said, in a recent article, that while the Gallic and Slavic fictionists deal with the primary human passions, — love, hate, revenge, ambition, and the like, — the Anglo Saxons delineate secondary and minor traits. This is a sweeping statement, not, I fancy, to be substantiated by a wide induction. But this much surely may be asserted—the handling of *motif* has been freer outside of English fiction, and, on the whole, the English books dealing with elemental humanity have been fewer. Also, the books that are great, in which the personages take the firmest hold of us, are those which portray these strongest, deepest interests and passions. This is the trouble with a good deal of the late work of James: he has come to consider delicate psychologic niceties more than primal instincts and desires. The carbonic acid gas of drawing-rooms, not the oxygen of the open, is breathed in his attenuated tales—with some noble exceptions. And it may well be that the

wholesome moral restrictions that until recently have bound, and in comparison with the extreme French and Italian work still do bind, our English-written fiction have made its men and women less broadly human in the sense that they have not been exhibited on all sides so consistently as in the best foreign work. Ethically viewed, however, the gain to fiction is greater than the loss. This leads to the interesting query, Has the realistic school, which has now for some years had its say, added permanent figures to the historic canons of fictional creations? If it has, its method is in some sense justified.

Were the characters in so-called realistic novels affectionately conceived by their makers, their chances for permanency would be good. There is no lack of talent, even of genius, in writers of this school. I should not be inclined to deny the latter highest quality to Thomas Hardy, to name one leader; yet he has not been prolific of these types, if, indeed, he has created any. The realistic writers as a class have not given us broad, living creations. The failure of realism to portray permanent types cannot be set aside by the

easy explanation that they deal for the most part with the seamy aspects of life. There are lovable rascals in fiction. No, the fault lies with the point of view, the method. The realist tries to see his characters objectively; he detaches himself from them; in a word, dissects them coldly. He sees them lop-sided, too much in the flesh. The realist does not love his creations. Love will cover a multitude of sins in the story-writer. When the romanticist of fiction, with a big heart and a catholic comprehension of human kind, shows you a bad man or woman in a sympathetic way, with the implication that there is some good along with the evil, and always the chance of better things, you are broadened and made serious-minded, but not depressed or devitalized. Hawthorne's Hester is a sinner, not a decadent. Stevenson's picturesque rascals are of this wholesome sort. Gilbert Parker's Pierre, in those wonderful tales of the far North, is of the same family. He is not a saint, Master Pierre, but a fellow one likes withal, and is helped, not harmed, by knowing. With very few exceptions, the strongest characters of

realists are not sympathetic; the author has not yearned over them fondly, and consequently the reader is not magnetized.

This reason why the realist fails in giving us permanent types — because, while they may be realized as actual, they are not truly loved — leads back to a renewed insistence on those two criteria: characters, to live and appeal broadly, must not only be vividly conceived by their creator, but must be winsome, must attract rather than repel. Dickens, on finishing a story, was saddened that he had to bid his imagined folk good-by. In one preface he tells how he hated to leave his *dramatis personæ*, being moved even to tears. Goethe used to set his literary characters in a chair opposite him, and talk to them literally. These incidents illustrate what I mean by vivid, loving conception in literature.

It is a fact which those who sneer at the ethical in literary art must explain, that the permanent fictional types are prevailingly those which depict the nobler and sweeter and more normal aspects of humanity. Moreover, I believe there is a deep psychologic reason for this, and

will speak of it anon. By no means will it do to claim that invariably these types are thus beautiful. Becky Sharp is as permanent as Colonel Newcome. If the drawing be sympathetic and masterly, and the traits recognizable, it is enough. But that the world of readers prefers those creations which exemplify the better, higher, purer, and sweeter side of humanity seems to me as indubitable as it is certain that the making of such calls out the best powers of the writer. This is an instinct of self-preservation in mankind: to wish the best they can show to live. Most of us would rather see noble folk than ignoble around us in real life: it is the same in fiction.

By a sort of reflex action, the very existence of such heroes and heroines implies potential heroics in ourselves, is a compliment and tonic to our human nature. And so it is that the permanent types of fiction are made up largely of those who in some way deserve the heroic designation. They are heroes and heroines, not in the conventional modern sense of the realist, whose nominal hero is an epitome of the vices or a walking congeries

of commonplaces, but in the good romantic sense, with the primitive Greek flavor to it of large, fine, sweet action. Here belong the main men and women of Scott, Eliot, Reade, Dickens at his most inspired. George Eliot is a stern realist, granted. One of her central figures — Tito in *Romola* — is a study of moral weakness rather than of strength. But he is a foil to *Romola* herself, and of Eliot's work as a whole it may truthfully be said that she draws real heroes and heroines — all the realer in that they sin and suffer. On a little reflection, it will appear that many a character of fiction you would not think at first of putting in the heroic category is preserved to immortality by some touch of nobility, a heroic strain, warped, hidden, blurred, maybe, but there nevertheless. Humanity will not readily give up the heroic, and is lynx-eyed to detect its gleam, even of the jewel in the dung-hill.

But in the hero-worship by novel-readers, the false-heroic is excluded; it is men, not demi-gods, that are admired. That which violates truth to real humanity is to-day foredoomed to fail. Such types cannot be realized by their maker,

and are unnatural to us. As notable a failure in this class as English fiction can show is Sir Charles Grandison in Richardson's novel of that name. Grandison, intended for a hero, is an insufferable prig, not to be credited for a moment, and always a bore. The tendency of the modern novel has been to draw credible heroes and heroines, or, at least, flawed characters with noble elements in them. Many of George Meredith's men and women furnish good illustration. Roy Richmond in *Harry Richmond*, Richard Feverel in the book of that name, Diana in *Diana of the Crossways*, — none of them saints, the first a scapegrace, the second almost morally wrecked, the woman in a strange scene selling her lover for money, yet all leaving the impression of natures capable of high love, courage, or self-sacrifice. Kipling, in a virile, careless way, has shown us the possibility of heroics in the rough British private. Barrie and Maclaren paint for an admiring host of readers the virtues of Scotch rustics, not blinking the faults and vices; and their types are likely to last, for the very reason that they are seen in the whole, they are recognized as

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Study in the Literary Time-spirit

A Study in the Literary Time-spirit

BJÖRNSSON, DAUDET, JAMES:

A STUDY IN THE LITERARY TIME-SPIRIT.



I

IT is conventional criticism to say that great writers make the Time-spirit. Now and then, perhaps, in the course of the centuries, it is true that dominant figures stand out ahead of their day and seem to shape its thought. Yet even some of the world masters — Shakespeare, Dante, Cervantes — are in many ways creatures of their epoch, moulded by its ideals, expressing the intellectual and spiritual standards of their land and period.

General propositions are dangerous; but I believe it will be found of the majority of leading literary figures of history that, rather than lead their day, they have expressed it, and, moreover, have changed with its change. Possibly it would be more philosophic to say that the age changes with them and because of

them; but analysis reveals the fact that, as a rule, expansion of thought and broadening of knowledge come from a field lying outside of literature; namely, from science. It is the business of literature to reflect this growth. The great creative writers take over this knowledge into the imaginative domain, and make use of it in art. In this sense they are the children of the Time-spirit. This thesis is illustrated by the literary work of three men, Björnson, Daudet, and James, all of whom occupy commanding positions in the letters of their respective lands. It is well to select writers of ripe maturity, since otherwise their careers would not extend through years sufficient to bring them under the altered ideals I have in mind.

The present literary standard and temper are expressed by the convenient, though hackneyed, word *realism*. Whatever its origin, however justifiable as a revolt from narrow and sentimental untruth in literary art, realism has brought in its train the cult of the grim, the low, the impure, and the horrible. It has also resulted in much that is admirable, and it registers an advance in technique. But the sins of real-

ism are heavy. This literary movement is far more than æsthetic. Within its wide boundaries are summed up and expressed the unrest, the doubt, and the agony of a period which, within a half century, has been compelled by the stern teaching of science to reconstruct its attitude towards the eternal, and to behold a new heaven and a new earth. Literature has had to assimilate these changes, and literary workers have expressed it according to individual bias and temperament. The shallow it has not so much affected, save as furnishing a pretext for the pessimistic pose. The weak it has crushed or driven into rebellion, license, and despair. The strongest and deepest have been changed and saddened by it. If our oldest living writers of highest literary repute in the civilized lands were studied for the sole purpose of observing how they have been spiritual barometers registering the ethic weather, the great gulf which lies between 1850 and 1890 would be realized. A brief scrutiny of Björnson, Daudet, and James will make the point clear.

II

Björnson shares with Ibsen the literary supremacy of Norway. The former is its hero and prophet as the latter is its judge. Through a long, strenuous, athletic life of struggle with forces practical and spiritual, Björnson has shown an intellectual development and a shift of ethical and artistic creed which are remarkable. He has well-nigh boxed the mental compass of opinion. This change is as obvious in his literary work as in his relations to the politics of his native land. He began his literary career by writing simple, exquisite idyls of country life, with little of plot or drama, but having great charm of truthful, sympathetic characterization and picturesque description. Read *Synnöve Solbakken* for a classical example of this *genre*. The book is a homely, beautiful prose poem in which the Norwegian peasant is revealed in his habit as he lives, by one who knows and loves him. Nor do *Arne* and *The Fisher Maiden*, which followed, representing his first decade of authorship, lie outside of this idyllic group. Nor again do his

dramatic works up to 1870 indicate the change that was coming. Tragedies he wrote, of course, as in the great trilogy of *Sigurd Slembe*, or in *Maria Stuart*. But we have strong, healthy romanticism here, as we have in Ibsen's splendid earlier history-play, *The Pretenders*, between which and the dreary sadness of his later social dramas there is a world of difference.

It is only after 1870 that the present Bjornson begins to emerge, that the insistent fatalistic note is heard, bespeaking the soul of one for whom the time are out of joint. In both plays and stories the gloom deepens rapidly, the stress grows grimmer and grimmer. During the years from 1872 to 1874 Bjornson, hitherto satisfied with Norway's people and her political status, expressing in literary forms this national eupepsia,—satisfied, too, with the world and its maker,—was undergoing more than a sea change. His writings began to voice this change of heart. He became the advocate of extreme republicanism in politics and free thought in religion. From this inspiration have come, during the last

twenty years, half a dozen or more novels and as many plays. A practical result has been that Björnson is mistrusted or hated of conservatives, adored by the young blood. The common folk, though looking askance at his heterodoxy, have not displaced him from his niche, won by his earlier portrayal of them, and by his superb patriotism. In a word, this leader, under the stimulus of late nineteenth-century ideas, has turned iconoclast; the intellectual goad of our time has made him a fighter; "only combat," says a friend, "arouses his Titanic energy and calls all his splendid faculties into play."

The subjects of his realistic and searching analytical dramas and novels are in evidence. Looking forth upon modern society, upon a world transfigured for him by Darwin and Spencer, he shows this trend in his literary product. Turn to the plays for a moment. *Bankruptcy* in 1874 was a study of the dubious morals in the money world, suggesting the parallel of Zola's *L'Argent*. *The Editor*, of the next year, is a savage satire on latter-day journalism, with its lies, scandal, sub-

terfuges. *The King* (1877) exhibits royalty as a curse because of the inevitable injury to the ruler's character, and because founded on a sham divinity, — this thesis significant in a land well-nigh in the throes of republican birth. *Leonarda* (1877) and *The Glove* (1883) deal boldly with aspects of the woman question, the former imagining the case of a spotted creature and depicting society's attitude towards her, while the latter shows a man in the same dilemma, society being as soft as before it was hard. The girl *Leonarda* is a manifestation of the New Woman, the sort of unconventional creature drawn by Ibsen, Sudermann, and the Englishmen, Jones and Pinero; and Svava in *The Glove* is another girl to be differentiated distinctly from the type obtaining of old. She is as frank as a boy with her lover, and insists that he be judged by as severe a standard as she herself. *Beyond his Strength*, the same year, shows Bjornsson struggling with the great modern question of monopoly. Labor is ranged against capital, workmen strike, ask for redress by arbitration, and finally lay a train by which capitalists in session are

blown up by dynamiters. Yet the master is not conquered, the trouble remains unsolved. The play states dramatically the existing conditions, and implies some right on both sides. A sombre, strenuous play it is, displaying distraught nerves and hysterical ambitions at war with peace and happiness. These six plays suffice to give an idea of the *motifs* used by Björnson since his emancipation.

A number of novels illustrate the same tendency. It will be enough to look at two leading fictions: *Flags in City and Harbor* (1884) and *In God's Way* (1889). The former, which has appeared in English translation as the *Heritage of the Kurts*, grapples with the tremendous question of heredity — a social factor that with modern literature is coming to play a leading rôle, like Fate in the Greek dramatists. Zola's whole scheme in his Rougon-Macquart series is based thereupon. So with this great work of Björnson's. Five generations of Kurts are analyzed; there is bad blood in them, a fierce, lustful heritage from savage forbears. The hero's father has married a noble specimen of untainted peasant womanhood, and his

racial instinct breaks out in a quarrel with his wife, whom he physically maltreats. But it is Greek meet Greek, for she is no white, weak, high-bred dame to be cowed by his insolence, but gives blow for blow, and before they are through the room is full of wrecked furniture as well as hopes. The husband, moreover, is second-best, and dies of apoplexy. This scene, coarse in fact, has such issues at stake that its significance is awful, removing it to another sphere from such another awful scene as that in *Tom Jones*, where Squire Western strikes his daughter to the floor. Now mark the sequel. The widow looks forward to maternity, and keenly aware of the probability that the child will have the father's disposition — be weighted by the terrible Kurt heritage — she thinks of killing herself. The strength and horror of this psychological situation are manifest. Finally she decides that if the child is dark, like the Kurts, she and it shall die; if blonde, like her people, it shall live and be reared in all right ways by its mother, so to purify the paternal taint. The boy child proves very disobligingly, neither fish nor flesh:

he is red-haired and gray-eyed, both father and mother appearing in him. So the mother dubiously decides in his favor, brings him up on a most scientific scheme of education (the treatment here reminds of Meredith's *Richard Feverel*), and lo! the result is that he turns out a prig — too good, as his father was too bad. He is a disagreeable ascetic, whom we grudgingly respect. A gleam of light is thrown in at the end, when he marries a wholesome girl of sounder stock than his own. Behold how impossible to fiction before the second half of the century such a thing is! Though of absorbing interest, the story hardly furnishes pleasant reading. The other novel, *In God's Ways*, is still more daring and drastic. The situation handled is somewhat like that in *The Heavenly Twins*. A wife, discovering she is linked to a libertine, leaves him and eventually unites herself to a young doctor who has revealed to her her wrong. Society, which has applauded the act which leads her into the shame of living with her husband, is shocked when she marries the other; and by a series of delicate deadly slights and innuendoes hounds her down to the grave.

There is a parson and his wife who, proper folks socially as well as ethically, condemn the woman, only waking up to her nobility when she is dead. The story, as centring around the New Woman again, is advanced, and is pessimistically sad in tone, though there are alleviations in other characters. That it is very Ibsenish may be gathered even from this meagre sketch. Some of the chapters are repulsively pathological — Zola has to look to his laurels at times. It may be added that in the later collection of short stories (1894) entitled *New Tales*, the uncompromising, harsh realism is if anything more marked, and the lime-light of the Romanticist is never turned on. Contrasting all this latest work with the Björnson of the early idyl, poem, and romantic history-play, one realizes what a change is here, what a moulding under the influence of the Time-spirit.

III

Turn now to a very different maker of literature, who yet has been sensitive to the same subtle influences. Alphonse Daudet, a supreme artist, naturally a

poet and romanticist, drifted far from his sometime tender and joyous sketches and stories into the joyless waters of modern realism. He began as a dreamer, a lover of Nature, a sun-worshipping Provençal. Think of his *Letters from my Mill*, the work of a young man of twenty-six, a delightful thing compounded of delicate humor and poetry and stingless satire. And in the first of the Tartarin series, coming a few years after, what a *chef d'œuvre* of satiric fun surcharged with the spirit of his natal south! It was not until 1874, when Daudet was thirty-four, that he came to see Life after the manner of the modern psychological school. Realism then got him in its grip. With *Froment Jeune et Risler Aîné* comes a right-about-face indeed. Here is a Parisian novel minute in its descriptions of modern types, searching in analysis, unpleasant often in scene or character, and pursuing relentlessly to the bitter end the inevitable results of bad acts. The plot is risky realistic in the extreme. A fine old fellow betrayed by his business partner and by the wife of his bosom is not an agreeable spectacle. Here again is the light woman

and the *drame a trois* which have become the stock properties of current French fiction; the three-cornered drama played by husband, wife, and lover.

The next novel, *Jack*, is as poignantly sad a thing as was ever writ. Like Sudermann's *Dame Care*, it is the autobiography of a shy, sensitive lad, but the Gallic touch makes it very different. Here we get the light woman who is a mother — a far more repulsive phenomenon than Sidonie in the earlier book. The son, driven from home, loses faith in all good, and incontinently goes to the bad. With all its pathos and power, *Jack* is a work of heart-rending gloom and irony. At the core of its intense moral earnestness lies the dry-rot of despair. The evil is presented for the sake of a comment upon Life's mysteries — the pity of its mistakes, the awfulness of its misdoings. *The Nabob*, two years later, is by no means so unpleasant, yet it could hardly be called cheerful reading, ending as it does in the social and financial downfall of its hero, the wonderfully drawn Provençal money-king. But the book contains much of stern realism in the analysis of character;

and in that other study of the Provence type, *Numa Roumestan*, whose protagonist is a brilliantly mendacious creature full of tergiversation and tricky finesse, certainly the after-taste is not agreeable, though few modern fictions can equal it for truth and force. The very dramatic and fascinating story *Kings in Exile*, with its picture of royalty stripped of its pomp and circumstance, its poetic handling of the romantic devotion which is inspired by the king idea, has less of the sombre quality we are drawing attention to in Daudet's later works. But *Sapho* (1884) shows the author's most extreme venture into the Zolaesque, and is hardly to be discussed. What a long road its author has travelled since the days of the exquisite short stories and the dreamy idyls of his youth! And what a savage, sweeping satire of social hypocrisy is *The Immortal*, which materially damaged Daudet's chance of admission to the French Academy! Whether or not personal rancor at his non-election to that august body underlay the animus of the book, its tone is decidedly cynical, and the final case of the Academician, laughed at by his col-

leagues, despised at home by his wife and son, and finding refuge in suicide, is sorry enough. Daudet's last novel, *The Support of the Family*, which has appeared in an English rendering since the death of the author, is a full-length, minute portraiture of a weak, corrupt nature; the romantic touch at the end is out of key with the drift of the book. But enough stories have been touched upon to show that in his major work, his full-length fiction, Daudet has moved steadily away from pleasing romance and poetry, and towards sombre portraiture and the destructive criticism of life. I do not forget charming idyllic studies like *Le Petit Chose* in 1876, or *La Belle Nivernaise* a decade later, little classics both; this writer has never lost utterly his early mood and manner. But the most serious and thorough-going work has been in the other direction. Allowing for the personal equation, it seems a fair statement to say that the Time-spirit has been as efficacious in shaping the literature and in changing the philosophy of Daudet as it has been in the person of his Norwegian brother-in-letters, Björnson.

IV

It remains to speak of the third author in the trilogy, a man and writer so entirely diverse from the other two that it seems whimsical to bracket them together. Yet Henry James also illustrates the workings of this same law. The Time-spirit has also had its way with him. To say that Björnson, Daudet, and James are realists, each after his own manner, is one way of illustrating how wide is the content, how loose the significance, of the word *realism*. James is no more like either of the others than chalk is like cheese. An Anglo-Saxon, of excessive refinement, the fleshly, as such, has no lure for him at all. But intellectually, and in the conductment of his tales, he has shown himself progressively one whose creed is summed up by the wearisome catch-phrase, "Art for Art's Sake." He applies agnostic analysis to the psychological states of human beings — psychology, character study, and development constituting his supreme interest. This taste, together with an increasing culture of æstheticism which

has run into a sort of man-milliner fussiness, has led him in his latest phase to substitute "nice shades and fine feelings" — in George Meredith's phrase — for the elemental interests and passions of men and women. Read *The Spoils of Poynton*, a recent book, in proof. A subtle indirection of style and tenuity of thought have contributed to an effect which has lost him the sympathy of many healthy-minded and intelligent folk. Yet with all subtractions, with a class narrowness clinging to all he does, he remains uniquely an artist in his peculiar field. But leave the James of to-day, for once, and go back twenty odd years to *Watch and Ward*, *The Passionate Pilgrim*, and *Roderick Hudson*. The one word by which to characterize this early work is Romanticism. *Watch and Ward*, his first fiction of moment, has analysis, the psychologic interest. But its pleasant ending is a concession to the romantic. A young man who adopts a little girl and rears her with the hope of making her his wife would not succeed always in life; and certainly would not succeed in James' later fiction. The book is full of poetic beauty and ideal

fitness. It shows us a James able to select from the raw material of life the happier eventualities of art. The six tales included in *The Passionate Pilgrim* are the work of the romanticist. Several of them are steeped in a gentle melancholy, but all of them are poetic, vital with human feeling that explains their atmosphere and justifies their *dé-nouement*.

These half dozen stories put one in thrall to a James one has to be reintroduced to if one has known him only in his recent work. Then consider that superb romance, *Roderick Hudson*, a novel which, for largeness, moving power, and sense of impassioned life, as well as for subject and atmosphere, it does not seem whimsical to associate with Hawthorne's *Marble Faun*. The conclusion is tragic, granted; but the tragedy is of that kind that purges and purifies — it is radically different from the ironic sadness of James' later stories. Its author, practically identical with Roland, the patron of Hudson, the gifted young painter, is not the detached observer of his characters he afterwards becomes. And it is largely

the Time-spirit that has made him finally an on-looker at Life's feast, watching with satiric resignation the march of Fate. In *Roderick Hudson*, in the earlier books in general, the writer is, as it were, implicated in the action, and grieves with the reader if the end be untoward. Little by little in James' development comes the sense of the hopelessness of the personal struggle. The romantic view of life, interwoven of dark and light, is exchanged for a quiescent pessimism that, because it is well-bred and not noisy, is none the less sardonic.

In *The American*, almost contemporaneous with the great story just named, and with it showing James in his heyday of power, the transition to the maturer mood is under way, but the balance between romanticism and realism is not yet destroyed and the result is a very rich, vital piece of fiction. *Daisy Miller*, a year or two later, being satiric in the lighter vein, is not so instructive for our purposes, although the romantic connotation is sufficiently absent. Nor does *The Portrait of a Lady*, in 1881, represent the altered James in high relief. These two books

are the successful work of a great artist slowly moulded by his philosophy (only in part by his temperament) into an unfriendliness with life. And *his* philosophy means, as it does with any man, his personal assimilation of the philosophy of his time. Recall the *Bostonians*, *Princess Cassamassina*, *The Tragic Muse*, *The Other House*, and *The Spoils of Poynton*, with the many volumes of short tales of which the recent *Terminations* is a fair example, — fiction standing for the past dozen years of labor, — and see if what may be called inconclusiveness of plot or story be not a striking element. And what is this inconclusiveness but the agnostic in literature, who limns character in the clutch of Nemesis? Add to this characteristic, indirection of manner, increasing attention to subtleties of detail, and a keener edge of cynicism, and you have the main traits of the present James.

The change of this American novelist under the influence of the Time-spirit, as compared with his foreign fellows, Daudet and Björnson, is a more shadowy thing, something to be felt subjectively rather than analytically described. It would be

a crude statement to say that the latest books end badly, are more unpleasant than the earlier. It is not enough to say that one hears a steady diminuendo of the romantic note. But it is true that one closes *The Other House*, or *The Spoils of Poynton*, or any one of the several collections of tales recently written, with a sense of despair — despair at the helplessness of humanity in the hands of a law inexorable as the law of gravitation and well-nigh as impersonal. One might say that for the romanticism which makes room for the heroic and for the aspiration which shapes character is substituted the romanticism of a disappointed poet who cannot escape his birthright, but who intellectually is out of sympathy with it. Thus, as it seems to me, the fiction of James, progressively studied, is as instructive in illustrating the influence of the Time-spirit as is the work of the other two writers. His individuality being differentiated from theirs in many ways, the result is distinct and different. But it is the one force working upon the three. With Björnsson, practical social protest; with Daudet, a dramatic statement of the modern social complex

in cities ; with James, more abstract, more purely psychological, the dissonance between action and opportunity.

V

The influence, then, of the Time-spirit upon these important modern writers, representing different lands, can be traced clearly enough in their progressive work. It has pushed them in the direction of what in literary parlance is called Realism, and what, regarding their books as a moral product, may be described as spiritual discontent or despair. I repeat that always the most earnest and thoughtful of the makers of literature at a given time are indicators of the soul-pressure. It is no mere coincidence that the growth of realism into a dominant literary creed has been contemporaneous with the incoming of scientific conceptions.

Literature inevitably reflects the intellectual and moral problems of a period ; ours is no exception. I do not go into the question of whether the change that has come over these literary masters means more gain than loss. There has

been both gain and loss. But it is interesting to note how sensitive is literature, as exemplified in the three men chosen for illustration, to the moral and mental growth of a given period. But what next? It is likely that with the readjustment of theological conceptions and the resultant new ethic, literature, as one of the things responsive to such change, will react towards idealism, expressing itself in work of a more optimistic temper and romantic in spirit. Indeed, such reaction has already begun in the young romantic school of English fictionists, led by Stevenson and Kipling; in the Scotch idyllists, Barrie, Crockett, and Maclaren; and in scattered phenomena in other lands, as, for example, the symbolist poets of France and the French neo-idealism finding voice in the clarion call of a writer like Wagner. A substantial gain will result from the wonderful realistic conquest. The complacent, shallow optimism of old in literature, its *naïf* unnaturalness, are no longer possible. But so long as youth is youth romanticism cannot long remain absent from literature. Schools, creeds, tendencies, are temporary; "they have their

day and cease to be." The love of adventure, the belief in the noble qualities of human nature, the hope of a fairer tomorrow making amends for a dark to-day, must "spring eternal in the human breast." These ideals must co-exist with man, and literature must return to them to have a vital existence.

IDEALS IN AMERICAN LITERATURE



LOOKING to the future of American literature, the questions to-day most pertinent to its welfare are these: What are its younger makers believing? and, What are they doing? Before an answer is attempted, it is well to remind ourselves that America possesses a worthy and dignified literary past. The fact that our first great heptarchy of singers has lived and left a rich legacy of creative production is enough to justify the statement; nor is the native accomplishment by any means limited to the work of Bryant, Whittier, and Emerson, of Longfellow, Poe, Holmes and Lowell. Time, which is as just in allotting a due period for vigorous effort as it is inexorable in announcing the arrival of the age of weakness and decadence, is on the side of a land like ours,

young in years, materially strong, with its gaze by instinct forward and upward; all natural laws of development, personal or national, declare in our favor.

And as to themes and motives, surely no country offers more stimulus to literary endeavor. With its vast panorama of human types and diversified territories, its dramatic shifts of fortune, and its pressing problems and rapid changes in social condition, the United States affords a field not surpassed certainly by any one of the European nations where letters obtain recognition. The subject-matter is here, for those who have eyes to see and the forthright arm of performance. Nevertheless, that our makers of literature are in some danger of becoming comparatively insensitive to such robust and legitimate *stimuli* is a conclusion forcing itself upon the earnest student. This is the day of the diffusion of culture and the spread of the cosmopolitan spirit, touching literature as they do all else: a fact which alone could explain that denationalization of themes and that adoption of transatlantic methods and models to be noted in some, though a minor part of, American work.

The very advance in the knowledge and practice of literature as an art makes this inevitable, indeed. Again, specialization, the study of particular environments and local types, obtains to the exclusion of broader national motives — this being obvious at a glance.

But if a better technique, cosmopolitanism, and attention to the local rather than to the national may go some little way toward explaining the indubitable change in the current mood and mind of our *literati*, the main cause is not here: it lies deeper and is further to seek. The trouble comes from what our literary producers believe, or are in danger of believing; it is in what may be called the negative spirit which broods over modern effort in letters that the chief menace is to be found. And since doing follows believing, the work will suffer unless the creed be changed; in truth, already has suffered, though in a less degree than is true of other lands where this mephitic influence strikes at the very vitals of all art.

The spirit that denies, as embodied in Mephistopheles, eats like an acid into the heart of endeavor; it is cynical and con-

templative as against the creative and optimistic ; but in presentment is smug and decent, *à la mode* in dress, and with the devil's hoof well hidden. In literature it is "artistic," in the jargon of the day. The paramount temptation of the newer generation of literary makers in this country is the acceptance, either by the conscious will or by the unwitting creative soul, of the "art-for-art's sake" doctrine, that legacy of the French naturalistic school already, by the confession of its great leader, Zola, waning away after thirty years of dominance. In a sentence, this creed would sharply dissever art from ethics : it concedes no morality to literature save the morality of the fine phrase ; it is the artist's business to reproduce nature, and he is in no wise implicated in the light-and-shade of his picture except to see to it that the copy is faithful. Taken over into fiction, poetry, and the drama from the sister art of painting, this banner-cry has resulted in a literary product whose foulness and lack of taste (accompanied often by great ability) one must hark back to the decadent classics to parallel.

The originaive cause of this significant movement and manifestation has not, so far as I have observed, been honestly set down. To say that it is the result simply of the increased perception of art, a natural evolution of the broader conception of technique and the extension of the *métier* of literature, is to trifle with non-essentials, begging the whole question. The plain truth is that the mood in art and literature conveniently summarized by the cant term "art for art's sake" is begotten, in the last analysis, of spiritual unrest and the shift or abandonment of religious convictions and ethical ideals. The interrelation between art and ethics being intimate and indissoluble, any change in the one is registered in the other sooner or later, as certainly as a humor of the blood tells tales on the body's surface. Always in such a case the ethic of the time is to the art-expression as cause and effect. It is idle to pother with secondary causes when here is the native source. Our day is one of great religious upheaval, of the broadening and clarifying of ethical concepts, of personal as well as corporate re-adjustment of

creeds and canons. To ask all this seethe of thought and emotion to leave no trace upon art, which is the expression of man's psychologic and spiritual life in terms of power and beauty, were like expecting the face of a maelstrom to be as calm and motionless as a shady pool in a trout-brook. Men and women of the time, under the stress of giving up old beliefs and the acceptance of new, are for the moment shaken, confused; some feel themselves afloat in a rudderless boat on a shoreless sea; others, though at first dazed, glimpse land ahead and keep a firm hand on the helm. And the elect of letters, especially those of the younger generation, in proportion to their depth and breadth, reflect these storm-signs, are sensitive to this barometer of the ethic weather.

Let us not dodge the fact: the morbid, the cynical, the naturalistic, and the decadent in our present-day literature, — all of this is, more than aught else, a sure emanation from the lack of faith and courage following on the loss (or at least change) of definite and canonical religious conviction. That it cannot always be

traced to this efficient cause proves nothing; it is said that a mushroom will appear above the earth an eighth of a mile from the fungus wood whence it springs; yet dependent thereupon by a filament many times too small for seeing by the unaided human eye.

But it would be a false representation of our age and country to bear down on its intellectual struggle in this most important of thought-domains and omit to speak of its affirmative and altruistic side—the side of practical humanitarianism, broader, more enlightened, more in the spirit of Christ, in short, than the world has before witnessed. The overthrow of letter-perfect Bible-infallibility will do good in the end, and has already liberated people as well as dismayed them; while the great lesson that a life of good is far more to be desired than a hard and fast adherence to a conservative creed begins to put forth lovely fruit in church and society. This spirit, too, is finding its strong expression in literature, and may be relied upon as a foil to the protuberant ugliness of the theory we are diagnosing. But this should not put us at ease with

"art for art's sake." It is to literature what materialism is to thought; and no robing in the splendors of Solomon can conceal the awful truth that death, not life, is in its person. Religion without spiritual activity is pithless formalism; art without spirituality (or ethical beauty, which I hold to be the same thing) is again a whited sepulchre, full of stinking bones.

It is not difficult to expose the fallacy of the creed which cries up manner as the be-all and end-all of art. A mere glance at world-literature proves beyond peradventure that the moving and permanent forces are those which are healthful, vital, positive, optimistic. Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Milton, and Browning are not decadents; men, all of them, cognizant of life's depths as well as heights, but never forgetting that accomplishment, aspiration, and peace are articulated into our living quite as truly as doubt, denial, and death. Hence these masters are open-air influences and a tonic to distraught humanity. The history of any puissant nation teaches the same thing; its athletic evolution and crest of

power mean a literature which is bracing and splendid, its devolution a product into which the minor note has crept and through which runs the self-questioning of decay. All records yield an irresistible Yea to the query, Does not the decadent in literature (when sincere and not an affectation) always square with a similar state of social and intellectual life in the nation? To accept the poems, stories, and essays of the school in mind as legitimate and natural is to self-doom the country's career and pronounce its noble work done and its maturity past—a claim so ridiculous as to be made only by a madman.

One may be allowed the shrewd suspicion that some of the decadent work of England in art and letters — for which such men as Oscar Wilde, George Moore, and Aubrey Beardsley are responsible—is the result of a self-conscious pose, not of a reasoned conviction or an impulse of the blood. The negative spirit in England is bad enough and sufficiently incongruous, but even if fit for one of the leading lands of Europe would be peculiarly out of place here in the

United States, forelooking to a great future. For American literature-makers to adopt — either consciously or unconsciously — the pessimism and dry-rot of France, Spain, Norway, and England is an anachronism analogous to that which Greece might have furnished if, in the day of Pericles, she had taken of a sudden to the pensive idyls of Theocritus and the erotic epigrams of Meleager. Our land, entering into its young heyday of national maturity, must develop a literature to express and reflect its ideals, or we shall display to the astonished world the spectacle of a vigorous people, hardly out of adolescence, whose voice is not the big, manly instrument suiting its years, but the thin piping treble of senility. Common sense and patriotism alike forbid such an absurdity.

Again, æsthetics and philosophy declare art for art's sake to be a silly lie. The confusion in the conceptions of a true æsthetic arises from a too exclusive devotion to the indubitable fact that art is primarily a matter of manner, of form. It were idle to deny that form is the imperative condition of the acceptability of any

work of art; and, not unnaturally, the devotees of the current fallacy have jumped from this to the conclusion that form is everything, the only test of worth and rank being technique,—which is a palpable *non sequitur*. The so-called realists ignore (often, though not always) two potent elements in an art creation lying at the base of any sound theory of æsthetics: to wit, taste and selection. Æsthetic taste decides what subject-matter comes within the purview of art, while the selective instinct chooses out the typical, relatively important phenomena which shall be reproduced in the magic peep-show of the artist. But taste is constantly and brutally violated by those who pride themselves on being veritists, on telling the truth at all hazards and about all things. The fiction of Guy de Maupassant, the poetry of Verlaine, and the plays of Hauptmann are in the way of spreading out before reader or auditor a dead-level of commonplace, or favoring a deification of minutiae or a faithfulness in the transcription of vileness, as if art's crowning merit were the merit of the catalogue. Needless to say, this is not a characterization of their

work at large; but these are the pitfalls into which their theory leads them betimes. Taste is trampled upon in the creator's lust for photographic re-statement; not the moral nerves alone, but those that resent disgustful associations as the senses resent ill-odors and discordant sounds, are outraged under the sacred name of Truth. Even were all this educative, the fact would remain that the æsthetic, which is the atmosphere of all artistic effort, is by this effort made impossible.

Moreover, there is no reason for believing that the dreary repetition of palpably sorrowful and sickening data of life, too well apprehended already by poor humanity, is of use for either time or eternity. The greater need is an induction in a mood which rises superior to these antinomies, bracing up men for hopeful, manly work, and, if so may be, for loving worship. It should be the purpose "of all good craftsmen," says J. A. Symonds, "not to weaken, but to fortify, not to dispirit and depress, but to exalt and animate." And Robert Louis Stevenson, with the end-of-the-century literary product in mind, remarks with his wonted perception that

"it would be a poor service to spread culture, if this be its result, among the comparatively innocent and cheerful ranks of men." If, as he adds, it be necessary nowadays to have a great deal of puling over the circumstances in which we are placed," in Heaven's name let it be done off the scenes, not in the presence of the audience.

In the inartistic indifference to selection, too, these *soi-disant* realists are guilty of a fatal mistake and overlook a fundamental requisite. The numbing of the æsthetic sensibilities so that offal is not recognized as such can be understood as the slow result of pseudo-education; but the ignoring of proportion, of light and proportion, of light and shade, of planes and values in the very professions which must learn these things as the A B C of their art, may be set down as an exhibition of stupidity. I use the hack-words of the painter, but with literature in view. To devote as much care and space and emphasis in a novel to the maunderings of a drunkard or the coquetries of a harlot, neither of whom represents cases of fallen and still fitfully re-emergent nobility, but

who belong to the rank and file of ineffective and bourgeois sin,—to give such character-types more attention and accent than is bestowed upon those of larger bulk and more ideal significance is an example of crass and vulgar misjudgment, and this entirely aside from all considerations of taste and *morale*. Du Maurier in giving the world his *Trilby* gave it also an example of the true artist's handling of such a theme, teaching the noble lesson of ethical growth in the case of a *grisette*, and so preserving moral balance in the depiction of Bohemian scenes and actions. Eliminate taste from art, and its corollary, the selective act of the artist in the midst of his raw material, and you reduce it to the methods of science and to the products of an unenlightened industry.

But philosophically, once more, the theory does not hold ; if it is false æsthetics, it is also false psychology. Beauty is the one desideratum of all artistic creation ; beauty in its broadest content, to include grandeur and the solemn effects following on the representation even of noble terror and sorrow. And Beauty, be it observed, is in all respectable philosophic analysis

since Plato, not a quality confined within the domain of the æsthetic, but at root a spiritual thing. Plato in declaring the True, the Good, and the Beautiful to be phases of the one great principle enunciated, once and for all, what Philosophy must but repeat; left a dictum not acceptable because it is the utterance of the great Greek, but because his were the insight and the imagination to grasp what is one of the inexpugnable verities of Thought.

It was this enlarging theory which Emerson never tired of championing; it was with this in his soul that Ruskin — prophet fallen upon evil days among younger schools who sneer at him as “literary” — said that two things enter into the greatness of a picture: first, the subject; second, the treatment; or, to rephrase it, inspiration and technique — and not technique alone. The beautiful in art, then, can no more be separated from ethics, from the spiritual, than can flesh and blood in the vital organism. Being the subtlest, most precious thing in art, it is to be above all else desired, striven for, and yearned after, and without it as an incentive and an ideal, the detail of a

Meissonier or the metrical wonders of a Verlaine are of small avail. It offers, moreover, an infallible touchstone in the grading of all art-work. If there be no choice in the sort of life spread out by the artist, if the instinct of lust dissected with truth and power be as interesting, as intrinsically valuable and beautiful, as the instinct of worship, then are all graduations destroyed, and it is idle for man to struggle up out of his primeval apehood toward kinship with the angels. Thus stripped of ambiguity, few will refuse to grant the idiocy of this attitude; yet all who contend for art for art's sake implicitly put faith in the argument. To try to turn ethics out of art is as foolish as to sweep back the sea with a broomstick. Nature, driven out by the Horatian pitchfork, will surely return again, and healthy-minded humankind can never be cajoled by the cant of the ateliers into believing for a moment that deftness of flesh-tints and truthfulness in character-drawing are the equivalents of purity in artistic conception and the inspiration of the creative imagination.

The younger literary folk of the United

States, then, are brought face to face with certain hard facts, and are bidden choose. They may follow older lands, letting the popular theory of the day generate and guide their work, thereby laying themselves open to the charge of imitation, un-Americanism, false æsthetics, and false psychology. Contrariwise, keeping a firm grip on the essential truth that a sound and efficient technique must bottom American literature as it must that of any and all lands, they may nevertheless have clear in sight the still broader and deeper verity that "beauty is truth, truth beauty," that in the ethic atmosphere only can the creative find its homeland and natural breathing-place, beauty being, in the words of Matthew Arnold, "truth seen from another side." We are aware that some critics, good men and true, having the best interests of our native literary and art production at heart, are fond of laying chief stress on the need of an unprovincial comparison of our work with other centres of civilization, in order to avoid a fatal self-sufficiency and the exclusive use of local standards, — a kind of literary Chauvinism. And coincident with this they

talk continually of technique, and deem it our crying duty just now to ensure that, lest talent and enthusiasm run to waste. Their word has its share of truth, but in view of this infinitely graver menace implied in the acceptance of an illogical and soulless principle and method, sure if generally received to result in malformation in place of wholesome growth, it may well be ranked as of secondary importance. I believe heartily that our *littérateurs* are by comparison scot-free from the worst phases of the delusion; the work being done on all sides is vital and vigorous.

Indeed, the negative spirit, the cynic mood, and the manner of the realist or the pessimist belong, with us, rather to the critics than to the creators, the latter being as a class (though exceptions will occur to all) sound at heart and only eager to do work which shall be sane, broad, truthful, and wholesome. The criticism which continually depresses a fine young extravagance, which reiterates the sacerdotal function of art-minus-morals, and which sneers down admiration for local impulses and data, is not wanting in the United States. Though perhaps not representative, it

exists, and so does a corresponding coterie among the literary folk themselves.

An American literature such as is in mind, and which if true to our literary forbears we must make, shall be at once practical and ideal ; practical, since it is the honest expression of national life and thought ; ideal, for that it presents not facts alone, but symbols — is not merely photographic, but artistic, by reason of its sensing the relative proportion of things and the all-important rôle of imaginative representation. Such a school of writers will beget poets and novelists who are also patriots, clasp clean and loyal hands, and taking an inextinguishable joy in their work, which they hope shall be for the healing of the nation. And all the people will say, *Amen*.

RENAISSANCE PICTURES IN ROBERT BROWNING'S POETRY.¹



THERE are three ways of learning about the culture life of a past people or period. One may read formal history concerning it: this way, the way most common and easy, is least interesting and least satisfactory. One may read contemporary documents: and this, the way of scholarship, is more excellent, but often full of difficulties not to be overborne by the general. Or one may read some writer who, having become saturated with the spirit of his epoch, gives it out in the way of literature — appeals not alone to the knowledge, but to the emotion and imagination. This method alone really vitalizes the past for us. It makes bygone figures move and breathe, bygone

¹ Read before the Boston Browning Society, October 26, 1897.

events become credible because actual to the mind's eye.

There is little danger, I fancy, in over-estimating the debt we all owe to literature in thus reconstructing historic life. Think of the contributions to historic fiction: Scott, Dumas, Thackeray, Bulwer, Stevenson, Sienkiewicz! I read a number of the authoritative histories of Rome, and know more or less of Cæsar and his city; I read Shakespeare's '*Julius Cæsar*,' and walk with that great man in the Forum, or feel the dagger of Brutus in his breast, and this in spite of anachronisms a-many and naïve indifference to archæological verisimilitude. The Iron Duke once remarked that he had learned all his history from the master-poet. Some admirable words by Woodrow Wilson are worth repeating here:

"How are you to enable men to know the truth with regard to a period of revolution? Will you give them simply a calm statement of recorded events, simply a quiet, unaccented narrative of what actually happened, written in a monotone, and verified by quotations from authentic

documents of the time? You may save yourself the trouble. As well make a pencil sketch in outline of a raging conflagration; write upon one portion of it 'flame,' upon another 'smoke;' here 'town hall where the fire started,' and there 'spot where fireman was killed.' It is a chart, not a picture. Even if you made a veritable picture of it, you could give only part of the truth so long as you confined yourself to black and white. Where would be all the wild and terrible colors of the scene: the red and tawny flame; the masses of smoke, carrying the dull glare of the fire to the very skies like a great signal banner thrown to the winds; the hot and frightened faces of the crowd; the crimsoned gables down the street, with the faint light of a lamp here and there gleaming white from some hastily opened casement? Without the colors your picture is not true. No inventory of items will ever represent the truth: the fuller and more minute you make your inventory, the more will the truth be obscured. The little details will take up as much space in the statement as the great totals into which they are summed

up; and, the proportions being false, the whole is false. Truth, fortunately, takes its own revenge. No one is deceived. The reader of the chronicle lays it aside. It lacks verisimilitude. He cannot realize how any of the things spoken of can have happened. He goes elsewhere to find, if he may, a real picture of the time, and perhaps finds one that is wholly fictitious. No wonder the grave and monk-like chronicler sighs. He of course wrote to be read, and not merely for the manual exercise of it; and when he sees readers turn away, his heart misgives him for his fellow-men. Is it as it always was, that they do not wish to know the truth? Alas! good eremite, men do not seek the truth as they should; but do you know what the truth is? It is a thing ideal, displayed by the just proportion of events, revealed in form and color, dumb till facts be set in syllables, articulated into words, put together into sentences, swung with proper tone and cadence. It is not resolutions only that have color. Nothing in human life is without it. In a monochrome you can depict nothing but a single incident: in a monotone you cannot

often carry truth beyond a single sentence. Only by art in all its variety can you depict as it is the various face of life."

Robert Browning has performed this noble service for us with respect to Italy and that intensely alluring phase of human culture and progress known as the Renaissance. In familiar words he sang—

"Open my heart and you will see
Graven inside it, 'Italy.'"

And this was no rhetorical vaunt, but very truth. The English poet assimilated with a sympathy unique among his compeers the past and present of that wonderful land. And as a result, he, in a large fraction of his work, reflected its life, the body and soul of it, as no other literary maker has begun to do. Its heart and intellect, its passion, art, music, literature, and scholar lore, are interpreted by him not as the pundit or archæologist or historic reporter would do it,—not for the fact's sake,—but after the manner of the poet,—for the life's sake, as one part of the mighty story of man's spiritual conflict and growth.

The question is sometimes raised whether the past can really be recalled and repictured with even approximate accuracy.

Is it Rome or the playwright's more or less ignorant idea of Rome that we are given? This is, after all, only a phase of the old argument of the absolute idealist: we know, not matter, but our notion thereof. For practical purposes the way-faring man has decided that matter exists; that if he butts with his head against a stone, the stone will be there and will hurt him. Likewise in this matter of reconstructing vanished things, it can never be proven that the literary presentation of historical characters and scenes is correct or half correct. The dead must needs come back to settle that for us. But this much may safely be asserted; of two ideas of those characters and scenes, that will do the most for us, and hit nearest to the truth, which seems vital and warm and veritable — which enables us to realize that such scenes have been, such characters have lived and died. In the utter absence of conclusive proof, we have quite as good a right to claim that literature can make us acquainted with the centuries foregone as

our opponent has to claim that to be impossible.

Browning, then, has given a superb gallery of Renaissance (as well as other) historic pictures, re-creating with dynamic force and virile imagination the evidence of things not seen. His method in doing this is all his own, and calls for a word of comment. As it seems to me, Robert Browning's tendency to the minutiae of learning, to what may be called archæological detail, is bad in itself and injures his work. Here at the start let me say that while I yield to no one in honest admiration and love of this puissant maker of literature, I do regard him as one of the most unequal of poets, and a man successful in spite of his faults, not because of them.

To come to a special illustration afforded by this Renaissance group of poems (and the stricture applies equally to the Browning historical poems in general): they do, indubitably, assume too much knowledge on the student's part; plunge too much *in medias res*, as it were; and by a recondite multiplicity of particulars put us in danger of not seeing the forest for the trees. That the poet, maugre this

trait, does on the whole interest us in the past, and stimulate us mightily by his pictures of it, is a wonderful tribute to his genius. His imagination seizes on all the intellectual furnishment of the poems until they become molten in that creative heat, and plastic to his shaping. A lesser man with Browning's method, in this field, would be insufferably dull, hopelessly unpoetical. At times even he succumbs to it, and is — I say it with humility — both unpoetic and dull. Let us take that crux *Sordello* — first of the poems illuminating my theme, — and see if the criticism applies in that case. The story of a poet's inner life in an Italian thirteenth-century setting, which is the theme, seems, for a psychologic writer and fellow-bard like Browning, eminently fitting: the development of *Sordello's* life and character, during which he loses himself only to find himself in death, has a subtle fascination. But the question presents itself: In order to make a background for such a figure, was it necessary or advisable to embroil the reader in such an historical tangle of events? Could not the psychologic problem — the study of a gifted, aspiring soul, suffering from self-

consciousness and paralysis of the will — have been put before the world with simpler *mise en scène*? and does not the intricacy of the stage setting constitute a main reason why this production of a very young singer and thinker is confessedly one of the most difficult he has ever offered as a stumbling-block for the simple man and a choice morsel for Browning societies? I think we must say "Yes." It is this, together with the occult expression, the overplus of metaphysics, and the lack of organic arrangement, which brings about a result I for one cannot but deprecate. The teaching, that only in Love can life find its true key, and that the Poet — in Browning's mind the ideal leader and purveyor of the higher knowledge — must think not of himself nor even of his art primarily, but of the welfare of brother-man, and that act and ideal must walk in healthy union, is noble surely, and typical of the mature Browning; but the manner of conveying this — there's the rub! Can *Sordello* be understood without a key? Can it with that aid, or at any rate without much vexation and weariness of the flesh? To judge by my own experience, the reply is a negative.

Those to whom it truly is a lucid and steadily inspiring creation are of a superior order of being—an order I admire from afar, but may not fellow with. But the whole poem is one thing, parts and passages quite another. In our quest for Renaissance pictures *Sordello* often rewards us; Heaven forbid I should deny it. The Guelph and Ghibelline feuds and the Lombard League are interwoven with the personal history of the protagonist; and if after a reading of the poem we do not *understand* those far-away and involved internecine quarrels, we *do* have ideas or images of mediæval life—its hot gusts of passion, its political ambitions, its fierce, coarse brutalities, its lyric episodes of love, its manifold picturesqueness—such as no mere chronicle could have given us. And this because a poet, saturating himself with contemporaneous documents in the British Museum, and thereafter visiting the scenes he would depict, really was able to reconstruct a long-done piece of human action so that it had body and soul, heat and substance. As a single brief example, take this passage from the third book, where *Sordello* returns to Verona at the call of his mistress, Palma:

"... I' the palace, each by each,
 Sordello sat and Palma : little speech
 At first in that dim closet, face with face
 (Despite the tumult in the market-place)
 Exchanging quick low laughter : now would rush
 Word upon word to meet a sudden flush,
 A look left off, a shifting lips' surmise —
 But for the most part their two histories
 Ran best thro' the locked fingers and linked arms.
 And so the night flew on with its alarms
 Till in burst one of Palma's retinue ;
 'Now, Lady !' gasped he. Then arose the two
 And leaned into Verona's air, dead-still.
 A balcony lay black beneath until
 Out, 'mid a gush of torchfire, gray-haired men
 Came on it and harangued the people : then
 Sea-like that people surging to and fro
 Shouted, 'Hale forth the carroch — trumpets, ho,
 A flourish ! Run it in the ancient grooves !
 Back from the bell ! Hammer — that whom behooves
 May hear the League is up ! Peal — learn who list,
 Verona means not first of towns break tryst
 To-morrow with the League !'

Enough. Now turn —
 Over the eastern cypresses : discern !
 Is any beacon set a-glimmer ?

Rang

The air with shouts that overpowered the clang
 Of the incessant carroch, even : 'Haste —
 The candle's at the gateway ! ere it waste,
 Each soldier stand beside it, armed to march
 With Tiso Sampier through the eastern arch !'

As we read this and similar passages we get a sense surely of that day of feudalism and chivalry, of vari-colored splendor, well-nigh barbaric personal conduct, and dire cruelties, beauty and cruelty clashing together like iron and gold,—a day of crude, strong contrasts, of impressive chiaroscuro. To run over a selected page of Browning is to comprehend this more vividly than by studying the whole of Symonds' *Renaissance in Italy*, noble work as that is. Such is the service of dynamic literature. Such is rendered only in flashes by *Sordello*. This, and its psychologic suggestion, constitute the main value of the poem.

If we turn to *The Grammarian's Funeral*, we shall find a picture almost steadily true poetry, that with rarest insight and grasp portrays the scholar-side of the age, as the other does its politico-religious strife. It seems a parlous thing, *a priori*, to make the figure of a philologist pathetic. But Browning does it. The importance of learning has never been more nobly limned. To be sure, this grammarian is no philologer in our modern sense: the study of language was to him a means, not

an end, — but that is true of all great word-wizards mediæval and modern ; men, for example, like the brothers Grimm in Germany.

I know of no lyric of the poet's more representative of his peculiar and virile strength than this, in that it makes vibrant and thoroughly emotional an apparently unpromising theme. In relation to the Renaissance, to the age of the revival of learning, the moral is the higher inspiration derived from the new wine of the classics, so that what in later times has cooled down too often to a dry-as-dust study of the husks of knowledge is shown to be, at the start, a veritable revelling in the delights of the fruit — the celestial fruit which for its meet enjoyment called for more than a life span, and looked forward, as Hutton has it, to an "eternal career." Note that the faith in a future life conditions and enlarges the view ; as yet the scientific attitude and mind had not come to the latter-day agnosticism. And how picture-like Browning makes it ! The solemn procession up the mountain, the master, "famous calm, and dead," in the midst, loftily lying in his aërial sepulchre among the clouds

(and intermittently the directions interpolated to give dramatic reality), — here again the traditions and ideals of the time are conveyed indirectly, and therefore with threefold force; the poetry of it is the chief thing, the one thing, in sooth, for the general reader. For let us bear in mind ever that any poet's first mission is to delight, not to instruct. The instructions should be unawares, by indirection. The poet who confounds the two is in danger of the council, as a didactic philosopher, or a metaphysician, or a scientist, — good rôles all, but not his.

The Grammarian's Funeral, then, is a noble vindication of the possibilities rather than the probabilities of that calling, having its historic interest in the implied high aims in scholarship of the time contrasted with later periods. No one Renaissance characteristic stands out in higher relief than this of learning. It is amazing how it cohabits with lust, cruelty, and what seems to our modern sensibilities an inconceivable lack of ethical development, existing in a devotion and an attainment that even now seem marvellous. The middle-age humanists were wonderful in

this respect. Scholarship is one of the most brilliant facets flashed down to us from that many-colored stone called the Renaissance.

The art side of the re-birth, a phase best loved by our poet, if one may judge by the frequency with which he wrote of it (to say nothing of his easy intimacy with all its figures, principles, and scenes), is illustrated in that very characteristic and truly great dramatic monologue, *Fra Lippo Lippi*.

The wayward child of genius is a fascinating object of study always; here is the type in the ecclesiastico-art atmosphere, with its dual blend of elements which did so much for Italian painting, and the golden period of creative picture-making. Suppose some one to take up the poem and to read it with no preparatory study of the harum-scarum monk artist, and only such knowledge of the stage-setting as would be commanded by a person of fair education. No doubt such an one would lose much, especially in this most representative *genre* of Browning's, the dramatic monologue, which, by its very method, assumes so much on our part and pro-

gresses by revealing character, not by narrative in the usual sense. Yet I am much mistaken if a vivid sense of mediævalism and of the Renaissance were not the result. In the first place, Fra Lippo is visualized and vitalized — no mere name he on the left-hand lower corner of his canvases, after reading the poem, but a very human flesh and blood creature, with a Bohemianish streak in him that makes serenades and moonlight and luring girl-faces irresistible to him, so that he must perforce take French leave of his fine quarters in the Medici palace and roam the streets in quest of frolic adventure, to be brought up with a sharp turn by the Florentine officials. It is all delightfully disreputable and human. Fra Lippo, in Italy, Villon, a not far from contemporaneous son of genius in another art and land, we come to know because whereas in their work we think of them on the side of gift and power — in their erring natural lives we recognize the touch of nature that makes the whole world kin. And then, too, how dramatically we are presented with the fact of the more or less unholiness of those in holy orders at that time!

This we are aware of theoretically : in a poem like *Fra Lippo Lippi* it is worked out in a scene with an ex-monk as hero, and what was assumed as history is clothed on with life. And still further : what a glimpse of mediæval Florence is given — beautiful lily of the Arno ! We may cry with the poet, "It's as if I saw it all !"

"Here's spring come, and the nights one makes up
bands
To roam the town and sing out carnival."

We feel the street-life, and we visit the convent, with its cluster of brothers agape with admiration at this early realist who paints people as they are, until the monkish circle is instructed by the Prior that that way is all wrong, —

"Your business is to paint the souls of men."

The description and criticism of the faults and virtues of the art creed and art accomplishment of the time are wonderfully acute. Lippi was wiser than his critics, knowing "The value and significance of flesh," and in spite of all his tomfoolery

and looseness is an idealist, and so hangs on to the belief that the world "means intensely and means good."

In dramatic pieces like this, and the still greater *Andrea del Sarto*, we are let into the very heart and get the blood-beat of the blooming-time of creative painting. If ever a phase of life were done from the inside, as we say, it is here: for once we are given "The time and the place and the loved one all together."

The range and variety of Browning in his Renaissance picture-making is again exemplified in the very different poem, "The Bishop orders his Tomb." Here we have limned for us the religious world on its side of ecclesiastical form, pomp, and show. It is revealed through the person of a Roman prelate who is seamy in his life, and worldly and worldly-wise on his deathbed, *in articulo mortis*. It is a terrible picture in its way; another intense monologue in form, and vibrant with emotion — spite of its rough, interjunctory manner. Art is illustrated from another angle: this soiled, proud, passionate, envious bishop, a good hater to the last, would have his monument a master-

piece, and how splendid his description of it, particular on particular, until the mind's eye sees the imposing, costly thing! He has the age's scholarship, too, and would have naught but good Latin inscribed on the stone; and in all his piteous request to his equally worldly sons he knows, poor worldling, that they will take his riches and never grant his last prayer. A sense of the selfish human animal, the same in all centuries, is conveyed savagely, truthfully, by this dramatic poem; while the local media are also brought before us in a wonderful way. The historical setting is not so much thought of here; the atmospheric impression is everything. Yet at what other period, in what other country, would a bishop have the intimate knowledge of and taste for architecture shown in this man's talk — let alone his wish for æsthetic propriety and fitness at a moment when secondary things and things not taking hold on the central core of being pass out of mind? How could the fact that the bishop cared supremely for an artistically beautiful sepulchre — cared for it as much as he did to crow over a rival in effigy — be more strikingly set before

us, and we be instructed at once in the main passions and interests of universal man and of Renaissance man? Once again we emerge from the poem, having touched the body of the Renaissance and felt it to be not a cold corpse, but warm and moved by breath.

The poem, *The Heretic's Tragedy*, still further illuminates our subject, and is one of those grim sardonic pieces very illustrative of a certain phase of Browning's genius—a *genre* in which he has done some of his strongest work. This time it is that darker side of the Renaissance, social, complex, exploited by its theology. It is right not to forget this reverse side of the shield, in directing main attention to its splendid face whereupon art has carven deathless characters. I find a great relish in such a setting forth of the intellectualizing of a dark age—for in respect of the substance of religion it *was* dark compared with our own. How the poem plunges us back into an all but inconceivable atmosphere of hair-splitting dogma and inhuman heartlessness! Man delights in the burning alive of his fellows: God is the jealous God of the old dispensation;

and how admirably this state of mind, naïvely unconscious of its own atrocity and crudity, is embalmed in this terrible dramatic lyric, with its shuddering realism, whose effect is heightened tenfold by its awful joviality of tone :

“Sling him fast like a hog to scorch,
Spit in his face, then leap back safe,
Sing ‘*Laudes*’ and bid clap-to the torch.”

And, what is most pertinent to our purpose, — how pictorial it all is! The poor wretch burning there can be seen as plainly by us as by the Paris mob that jeered at his contortions. Once more a far-away scene is not so much put before us on a flat surface as set about us atmospherically and with perspective, so that we are in it and of it. This is a wonderful thing to do, especially in a case where all is alien to our present notions. The poem is at once objective and subjective, a canvas and an emotional and moral experience.

These Renaissance poems, then, — aside from their abstract virtue as intensely felt and virilely wrought verse, — perform one of the great and rare services possible to literature. They make us to know past

beliefs and feelings, people and actions, so that all becomes veritable and explicable: to know them not formally and by effort and intention, but spontaneously, through the dynamic communication of heat and light. Instead of the statics of knowledge we are given the dynamics of life.



Old English Poetry

I
OLD ENGLISH POETRY



THE day is fast arriving when attention will be paid to the treasures of our older English poetry as such. It is natural enough that the study of the language in its philological aspects should be precedent to an appreciation of the literary side of the subject. This has, in fact, been the case. But as special students of English have been long familiarizing themselves with the linguistic problems in connection with Old English work, the ground has been prepared for those whose chief interest is in the humanities, and who would use the acquired land as a field for the cultivation of the flowers of song. Signs are not lacking that what has been regarded as the private preserves of specialists will soon be the legitimate property of all lovers of literature. It is significant that an attempt to offer a literary transla-

tion of *Beowulf*, our first great English epic, by an American scholar, Professor Hall, of William and Mary College, has been followed hard on by another from English hands — that of Professor Earle. Dr. Gummere's recent admirable work on *Germanic Origins*, with its copious and spirited renderings from *Beowulf* and other Old English poems, is again a book pointing the same way. Mr. Stopford Brooke's fine *Early English Literature* is a later hopeful sign.

It is high time, then, to approach the hoary remains of English song, not so much in the spirit of comparative philology as in that of æsthetic appreciation. In this mood I write of two obvious and representative aspects of this older literature, which richly repay sympathetic study — a study which may be heartily bespoken it. A foreword as to nomenclature. I use the term *Old English* as synonymous with *Anglo-Saxon* and as preferable thereto; it is the designation applied by progressive students to all our literary remains in England from the earliest monuments extant to about the middle of the twelfth century; thence to the year 1500, say, we may

speak of Middle English ; the remaining literature being denominated, of course, Modern English. Perhaps the strongest argument for thus naming our earlier literature is the emphasis it puts on the fact that we are dealing with but one tongue, seen in its varying stages of growth. An idea of the vital connection between *Beowulf* and Browning is thus inculcated ; whereas, if we say *Anglo Saxon* a feeling of something foreign in kind as well as distant in time is begotten. It is this oneness, this organic relation of the English language and literature through all sequences of its development, which is now being accented by scholars, and hence those terms are best which are in conformity with that conception.

In spite of this assertion that our older poetry should be regarded as of a piece with what is more modern, it must be confessed frankly that at the first approach to it the student is likely to be repelled, or, at any rate, given pause. On the threshold he is met with a rude setting aside of verse canons and conventions of to-day, while he is bidden to breathe an atmosphere which substitutes

a sharp and bracing keenness for the soft languors and southland allurements to which he may have been more accustomed. This poetry, forsooth! This is barbaric, inchoate, an outrage on the æsthetic, and unworthy even of the nether slopes of Parnassus. Somewhat so runs his thought. But persisting in the will to get at one with this strange product, the same student in due time begins to feel the tonic of the air; to habituate himself to the rough, bold grandeur of the scenery; to enjoy the natural cadences of the wind that harps in his ear. In other words, what seemed irregularity of rhythm is seen to be a looser-moving but law-abiding metre; harshnesses of word-use reveal their fitness and vigor; and a deep, rich music, a fuller-mouthed tone-color, is heard, such as modern words and melodies are more miserly in offering; while uncouth inversions and sentence-gyrations resolve themselves into the fit and felicitous way whereby those gleemen of long ago vented the song and sentiment that was in them. And so there comes a real delight in the virile strength and grave sub-tones of music germane to Old English verse.

As is now pretty well understood, alliteration, employed with regularity and artistic consciousness, is to Old English poetry what rhyme is to modern, the latter being unknown. In offering a translation, then, of such verse, its alliterative character, as well as its rhythmic character, may be reproduced when possible, or the more familiar and pleasing form, blank verse, be used. In the following papers the Old English line is used in the one case, blank verse in the other, that the two may be compared. As to the law of the use of alliteration, it is enough to say here that every normal Old English line has four accents, divided by a cæsura, and that three of these — the first, second, and third — take the alliteration on the rhythmically accented word. Add to this that the lilt or measure is prevailingly trochaic with such intermixture of dactyls as to give a freer and less monotonous effect, and an intelligent notion of the mechanics of Old English poetry may be had. Thus it will be seen that the oldest verse-type in English is opposed in its movement to what may be called the modern verse-type, *par excellence*; namely, the

iambic pentameter as seen in blank verse. This fact suggests psychologic causes and offers a fascinating line of inquiry. How different the swing of the tripping trochees or leaping dactyls from the stately march of the line of Marlowe or Shakespeare! I subjoin a single Old English line with the stresses marked, by way of illustration:

“Hále hilde-deor Hróthgar grêtan.”
(“The hale hero, Hrothgar to greet.”)

Two other characteristics of Old English verse remain to be mentioned — the metaphor and parallelism. The metaphor is to our primary poetry what the simile is to its later development; it is a stylistic feature permeating all Old English writing, and it imparts an effect of vividness and force that give the literary product a distinct complexion of its own. Readers of the Elizabethan dramatists are aware what a leading *rôle* is there played by the metaphor—or *kenning*, as it is known in Old Norse poetry—when compared with its modern use. But with Shakespeare and his contemporaries the simile (which is only the metaphor ex-

tended) is also made much of, sharing the rhetorical honors with its older fellow-figure. But in the Old English days, the simile was practically undeveloped; it was for a later and more self-conscious age to cultivate it. Thus, in the epic of *Beowulf*, a composition of about 3,200 lines, there is but one simile in the modern expanded sense, while metaphors star every page. The gain in strength by this close-packed, terse figuration is immense.

Again, Old English shares with Hebrew poetry the characteristic of parallelism or repetition of the thought in slightly altered phrasing. The Hebrew Scriptures offer hundreds of familiar and well-loved illustrations: "For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night." Similar constructions continually meet the student of Old English verse, or indeed of Germanic verse in general, whether English, Low or High German, or Scandinavian. At bottom this so-called parallelism is, in all probability, the creature of the emotional impulse which by the law of its being demands a wave-like repetend of the thought ex-

pressed, by clauses of parallel formation. The impulse, too, being emotional, is also rhythmical, and here is another reason for repetition. In Old English, however, what was in its genesis impulsive and of the emotions became a formal mark of verse, and a most effective rhetorical device, when skilfully managed.

With these brief comments upon some of the most obvious phenomena of Old English poetry on its subjective and objective sides, let us come at our study of two of its aspects.

II NATURE IN OLD ENGLISH POETRY



IN the epic of *Beowulf*, our first great English epic, with almost countless references to the winter season, the sweet, antithetical season of summer is not once mentioned. This fact is significant, and stands for a good deal. At first it appears sufficiently astonishing. England is fair now in the season, and it was so at the end of the fourteenth century when Monk Langland began to sing :

“ In a summer season
When soft was the sun,
I was weary of wandering, and went me to rest
Under a broad bank by a bourne side.”

No winter rhyme this, of a truth. It was so, too, a hundred years earlier, in 1300, when a nameless poet warbled of spring in this wise :

“ Between the March and April,
When sprays begin to spring,

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The little fowls they have their will
In their own way to sing."

If this be the note of the bards in the year of grace 1400 or 1300, why not in the seventh or eighth century, five hundred years before, which is the presumable date of the *Beowulf*? It is hardly a satisfactory answer to say that the beauty of nature was there, but not the eyes to see it. Old English literature is rife with passages testifying to appreciation of the sterner moods of nature, a cognizance of her wintry phenomena, her rigors of land and sky and water. It is only on the side of warmth and bloom and fragrance that the poetry is so woefully lacking in expression, so insensitive to loveliness and joyance. The explanation lies in large part elsewhere. To give one reason: the first poetry written down in England partakes of the atmosphere of the physical conditions of the country whence come the original settlers, namely, that of the low-lying lands of the Baltic, the North Sea, and the more northerly Atlantic. *Beowulf* itself, for example, is entirely un-English and Continental in its *locale*, the scene

shifting from Denmark to Sweden. And so with the lesser poetical product: it is the climate of the lowlands, of Norwegian fiords and Danish nesses, that is in the English literature of the earliest period of production; hence it is the darker and grimmer phases of nature which are voiced and pictured in the poetry. A striking illustration of this is to be seen in an Old English idiom. It was not the Anglo-Saxon's way to use the word "year" as a denominator of time; he spoke of "thirty of winters" instead of thirty years, evidently an unconscious tribute to the prominence of that cold and nipping season in his calendar.

Another explanation of this fondness of our ancestors for winter landscape brings us within the domain of psychology. The first poetry of the race is pre-Christian, heathen in warp and woof; and in the literature which antedates Christianity — which has Odin and Thor in the heavens and fatalism as its ethical creed, instead of the sunburst of hope and joy which comes with the white Christ and his cheerier promises of happiness and heaven — the poetic spirit is distinctly, indubitably, more

joyless, less perceptive of the bright side of things. Nature, which to the modern poet is but the garment of God, was to his Old English forbears a chilling rather than an inspiring spectacle; for back of the myth-gods themselves stood Fate, Necessity, with laws that no man may dodge, and with an iron will in place of a tender heart. Germanic mythology and literature give a lively sense of all this.

These two causes, then (to mention no more), blend to bring about a fact which, at first blush, strikes the modern student as curious and repellent.

As a result of this dominant note of winter in Old English poetry an effect of gloom and sternness is made on us, especially if we come to the study full of the tropic exuberance and troubadour gayety which run through the literary product of the Romance peoples; or if we are steeped in the bland brightness of classic imagery; or, again, if we are conversant with the rich color and sensuous languors of some of the Oriental literatures. It is somewhat gray business, this harping on the one string, this chronicling of only such objective phenomena as are characteristic of the

frozen earth and the ice-beaten sea. Yet if sunny charm and color-play and soft melody are wanting, there is great graphic power and a sort of wild music in many of the descriptions; we get good etchings, strong black-and-white work, if not the landscapes of Claude and Turner; and there is stimulation for one who has been bred in softer pleasures to turn for the nonce from scented rose-gardens and lute tinklings to the sound of storm-swept pines, the smell of briny waters, and the sight of blood-flecked battle shields shaken in mortal combat. "Pretty" may not be the adjective to apply to such a poetic product, but "fine" and "strong" and "virile" emphatically are.

Examples follow of the way in which the manifold demonstrations of the external world wrought upon our forefathers, as they feasted, hunted, fought, and prayed in Saxon England more than a thousand years ago, and how this found vent in their song. In time, no doubt, we shall have the whole body of Old English poetry in a form which will commend it to popular use and appreciation; as yet, however, much remains to be done, and every

worker may contribute his mite. In turning the passage into modern English, I repeat, the Anglo-Saxon verse-line, with its four stresses, or accents, and its definite alliteration taking the place of the later device of rhyme, is reproduced as nearly as may be. Inevitably, the result is a metre of so much looser, less regular rhythm that an effect of carelessness and comparative formlessness is produced on the reader familiar with more modern verse-laws. The rhymeless dithyrambs of Walt Whitman are at times suggested. But although the conception of metrical movement is freer, the laws that govern it are as exact and the artistic limitations as rigorously obeyed as anything that more recent poetry can show. It is a popular error to regard this early verse-product as rude and deficient in art.

The long, striking, and beautiful lyric known as *The Wanderer*, a truly representative poem in its sadness and full of the lament of personal bereavement, contains but two brief references to nature. This is an indication of how laconic is the early poet's use of this embellishment or accessory, which in modern times threatens to preëempt the whole canvas at the expense

of motifs and animated foregrounds. Even the most subjective of Old English poets was not satisfied to paint a picture for the mere picture's sake. The Wanderer, a minstrel, is imagined at sea, having lost all his friends, including the lord whose vassal he once was, and is thinking over his past with sick memory. Having dreamed of better times, when his lord clipped him and kissed him, while the bard in turn affectionately laid his hand and head on the kingly knee, he wakes to a realization of his present misery :

“There awakeneth eft the woful man,
Seeth before him the fallow waves,
The sea fowls a-bathing, broadening their feathers,
The rime and snow falling, mingled with hail.”

And the poem says that at the sight of this welter of storm-smit waters instead of the warm, feast-glad interior of the great hall — the scald's heart is made the heavier. It is a veritable etching, a sea piece in monochrome, and very typical. It may be said here that perhaps no one phenomenon of nature plays so large a part in Old English literature as the sea, because it played so large a part in the life as well,

and again was a monster that spoke the Saxon's sense of the change, the bigness, and the mystery of human days. It were interesting to trace its steady influence in the great singers of the race. Think what inspiration, what imagery, it has furnished Shakespeare, and a long train of successors down to Swinburne and Whitman! The epithet "fallow" as applied to the waves, in the lines just cited, is very fine, and shows the true selective felicity of poetry. In contrast with the gray clouds and the snow-filled air, the water would have taken on just that dusky yellow tinge described by the word. The color scheme of the Anglo-Saxons, it may be remarked, was far more restricted than is ours to-day. Several of our commonest colors appear not at all, and light and shade seem to have made the strongest impression upon them. This fact is a curious commentary on a passage in one of Ruskin's lectures on art, where he remarks that "the way by color is taken by men of cheerful, natural, and entirely sane disposition in body and mind, much resembling, even at its strongest, the temper of well-brought-up children;" while,

contrariwise, "the way by light and shade is taken by men of the highest power of thought and most earnest desire for truth; they long for light, and for knowledge of all that light can show. But seeking for light, they perceive also darkness; seeking for substance and truth, they find vanity. They look for form in the earth, for dawn in the sky, and, seeking these, they find formlessness in the earth and night in the sky." It hardly seems amiss to name as exponents of the two types here adumbrated the man of Romance stock, sun-loving and *insouciant*, and the Teuton, with his mood bred of northern gloom and barrenness.

The second passage in *The Wanderer* occurs near the close of the lyric. The singer gives a gloomy picture of the earth when the evil days come of loss and change, of age and desolation :

"Storms shake the stony cliffs,
The snow falls and binds the earth,
The winter wails, wan dusk comes,
The night-shade nips, from the north sends
Rough hail, for harm to heroes."

This is vivid description, and proves a vigorous grasp of vocabulary and a happy

power in seizing on typically representative features of a wintry landscape. It is not cataloguing, but the movement of the awakened imagination.

In the mysterious, ill-defined lyric which Grein calls *The Wife's Complaint*, and which seems to tell of a woman exiled in a sad, dim wood, far away from her husband, there is a short description which again has shadow and sorrow for its setting, the woman's ill stead being echoed and transcribed in the phase of the external world which is presented. She is telling of her banishment and the place of her abode:

“ They bade me to dwell in the bushy woods,
Under the oak-trees down in the earth caves.
Old are the earth halls ; I am all-wretched ;
Dim are the dens, the dunes towering,
Dense the inclosures, with brambles engirt,
The dwellings lack joy.”

The reference to *The Wife's Complaint* turns the mind instinctively to the longer and remarkable lyric known as *The Ruin*; only a fragment, but as precious in its way as one of Sappho's, and full of Old English feeling for the dark things of life, fairly revelling in descriptions of physical

destruction. The subject is a city in ruined decay and neglect, and the poem deals scarcely at all with nature directly, but rather with the effects of time upon the work of men as seen in the fallen wall and tower and rain-pierced roof. In the tenth line, however, there is a touch worth noting. The artisan who built all this mighty structure, says the poet, is long dead, and now his work after him is crumbling to naught. But it was not always so.

“Often yon wall
(Deer-gray, red-spotted) saw many a mighty one
Hiding from storms.”

The descriptive touch *en parenthèse* is as accurate and careful as it is laconic. It implies real and fresh observation, and a wish for truthful representation.

Another lyric which may well be placed in evidence is that called *The Seafarer*; it contains several descriptive passages which make it interesting for our particular study. It pictures a lonely seafarer afloat on the waters, with the usual unpleasant concomitants of bad weather and bleak season:

"I may of mine own might a sooth-song sing,
Say of my journeys how I through toilful days
Often endured arduous times,
Had to abide breast care full bitter,
Knew on the ship many a sad berth,
Fierce welter of waves, where oft they beat upon
me

In my narrow night-watch at the boat's bow,
When it hurtled on the cliffs, conquered by the
cold ;

Then were my feet by the frost bitten,
In fetters bleak. . . . No man may know it,
Who on the fair, firm land happily liveth,
How I, sore-sorry one, upon the ice-cold sea
Winter long dwelt midst evils of exile,
Lorn of all joys, robbed of my kinsmen,
Behung with icicles. Hail blew in showers ;
There heard I naught but the streaming sea,
The ice-cold wave ; whilom the swan's song
Had I to pleasure me, cry of the water-hen,
And, for men's laughter, the sea-beast's loud voice,
The singing of gulls instead of mead-drink.
Storms beat the stony cliffs, while the sea-swallow,
Icy-feathered, answered ; full oft the eagle,
Moist-feathered, shrieked."

Here we have a full-length portrait of misery, with much vividness and particularity in putting before us the monody of sea and sky and fate. A little farther on, the scald seems to imagine himself on land in the winter, and with the incon-

sistency of human nature, he gets up a longing for the very terrors he has expended so much energy in bemoaning :

“The night-shades thicken, it snows from the north,
Rime binds the land, hail falls on the earth,
Coldest of corn. Wherefore surge now
The thoughts of my heart, that I the high streams,
The play of the salt waves, again might essay.”

Truth to tell, the Anglo-Saxons minded stiff weather on the water far less than we their degenerate descendants. They knew the sea in all her moods; they lived and fought upon her, and their in-trustment of the dead body to her at the last, the death-boat pushing out into the open brine to float at will of wind and wave, is a touching proof of the magic and magnetism she exercised upon their mind.

Another passage in the poem must be given. This time it is a brief description of spring, and a pleasing one :

“The woods take on blossoms, the burge grow fair,
The plains are a-glitter, the world waxes gay.”

But now comes the typically Old English melancholy, like a death's-head at the feast :

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But all monisheth the heedful of death,
fare on a journey, he who meditateth
Over the flood-ways far hence to go.
So broods the cuckoo with mournful words,
So sings the summer's ward, foretelling sorrow,
Bitter in soul."

It is suggestive, in the face of this treatment of the cuckoo as a harbinger of woe, to compare therewith Wordsworth's exquisite poem to this bird :

"O blithe new-comer ! I have heard,
I hear thee and rejoice.
O cuckoo ! shall I call thee Bird,
Or but a wandering Voice ? "

And then the closing stanza :

"O blessed Bird ! the earth we pace
Again appears to be
An unsubstantial, faery place,
That is fit home for thee."

Here is spiritualized cheerfulness instead of sorry forecast, bearing out my assertion of the more hopeful interpretation of nature under the reign of Christ.

Mention must be made of the two fine ballads, *The Battle of Brunanburh* and *The Battle of Maldon*. The former, em-

bedded like a glowing ruby in the dull gray prose of the Saxon Chronicles for the year 937, contains a couple of bits of nature description, and one of them may be given. The theme of the ballad is the victory won over the Scots and Northmen by King Athelstan and Eadmund the Etheling, his brother ; and the chosen extract is characteristically sombre and Old English. It deals with beast-kind, with the three creatures, feathered or four-footed, who are inevitable grim concomitants of the battle-field in the unsavory post-bellum capacity of scavengers. The mention of birds and beasts like these, instead of the innocent and lovesome song-makers who warble and chirp in modern verse, is another indication of the gloomy mood of our heathen forefathers. The victorious king and the Etheling, says the poet, sought their own homes in Wessex, turning their backs on the bloody field with its harvest of dead bodies.

“Left they behind them, to rend the corpses,
The fallow-coated one, the swart raven,
The horny-nibbed and the gray-coated
Eagle white-breasted, carrion to enjoy ;
The greedy war hawk, and that gray beast
The wolf in the wood.”

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That evil triumvirate, the raven, the hawk, and the wolf, fairly haunt Old English poetry; and this is largely explained by the predominance of the theme of war's havoc, which naturally brings the creatures of prey in its train. They give occasion for some of the finest passages in this drastic vein, and, however unpleasant to modern æsthetics, it were foolish not to feel how truthful and keenly observant and vigorously sketched are such lines as these just quoted.

The *Battle of Maldon*, although a much longer poem, contains hardly a trace of nature-painting, being sternly epic. *Brunanburh* is a more triumphant song than *Chevy Chase*; *Maldon*, contrariwise, chronicles the dire defeat of the brave Alderman Bryhtnoth, in Essex, in the year 991, by the Vikings. The single example, again, of grim suggestion, is a brief two-line stroke. The fight is fierce; the doomed ones begin to fall, and the scavengers with unseemly haste to gather:

“Then was a cry uplift, the ravens flew about,
The eagles, flesh-eager.”

It remains to speak of the literary monument which in importance, as well as in length, overtops all else in poetry that Old English days have bequeathed to us: I mean the *Beowulf*. The reader is reminded that the theme of *Beowulf* is the deeds and days of the great hero by that name; who visits the Danish King Hrothgar; fights, and eventually kills, the fierce dragon who is depopulating the great hall of the latter; returns to his native land of Gotland, in Sweden, and rules there prosperously for fifty winters as king, until he dies, heavy with years and honors, in a conflict with another dragon, and is buried with due pomp by the seashore, and mourned as a good lord, — a lofty death-barrow being erected in his honor, with a bright beacon thereon, that the distant shipfarer may be cheered. So far as the treatment of nature is concerned, this poem is grim and gloomy in the main. We hear much of dusk, stony cliffs, of weird waterways (the supernatural comes much into play in the poem), of wintry moors and bleak earth-holes, but next to nothing of the shine and the joyance of life, either objective or subjective. What joyance

there is comes of battle, or of beer-drinking about the hearth-fire at night. So that the greatest Old English poetical production bears out the reiterated statement that it is the night side of nature which is presented in the earliest literature. The first passage cited brings up a scene in the great hall of King Hrothgar, who is entertaining Beowulf, just arrived from his sea journey with his attendant troop. Ale and mead have been circulated, and one of Hrothgar's thanes, who is well drunken, twits Beowulf with being outdone in a famous swimming match in the ocean by one Breca. Beowulf indignantly denies this insinuation, and straightway tells the true tale of how he beat Breca. Never is the Old English hero backward in coming forward about his own deeds; modesty, as we reckon it, was not one of his prominent traits. Siegfried in Wagner's operas, another Germanic hero, furnishes a further example. In the course of Beowulf's story we get this description of the winter sea. It is left to the hearer to imagine the icy-cold of the water and its effects on the hardy swimmers:

“ Then were we twain there on the sea
Space of five nights, till the floods severed us,
The welling waves. Coldest of weathers,
Shadowy night, and the north wind
Battelous shocked on us ; wild were the waters,
And were the mere-fishes stirred up in mind.”

By mere-fishes here are meant whales, and the powerful statement is therefore made that the upheaval of the sea was such as to disturb even leviathan. It will be seen that, on the whole, this swimming match is accompanied by rather more serious incidents and conducted under more stringent conditions than the average wager of its kind. Farther on in the poem, after Beowulf has successfully met the monster Grendel, and driven him, howling with rage at the loss of an arm, back to his native fen, his mother, the she-dragon, comes by night to avenge her son, and seizes one of Hrothgar's henchmen, bearing him off to feed on his body. In the morning the king is made aware of this occurrence, and on meeting Beowulf tells him of it, bewailing his loss. He enters into a detailed description of Grendel and his dam, his habitat, how dread the place is ; and calls on Beowulf for help in his

grievance and peril. During his monologue comes this picture of the lair of these uncanny pests :

“ They guard a weird land,
Holes for the wolves and windy crags,
The fearful far ways where the mountain flood
Under the misty nesses netherward falls,
The flood 'neath the earth. 'Tis not far henceward
In measure of miles that the mere standeth ;
Thereover hang the clamorous holts,
The woods rooted firm, o'erwatching the water.”

The deep-mouthed, resonant tone-color of the vernacular gives voice well to the idea of the eerie aloofness and mystery of the place. One thinks, in reading such a description, of the palette of a Rembrandt or the word power of a Dante. Only a few lines farther on the picture receives a few additional details :

“ That is no happy spot,
Thence the waves' mingle upward mounts ever
Wan to the welkin, when the wind rouseth
Storms full loath ; till the air darkens,
The heaven weeps.”

In its elements of mournful mystery, its touch of magic, and its imaginative grouping of the terrors incident to the

stern aspect of sea and land in the north, such writing may be marked as finely representative not only of Old English, but of early Germanic literature, which still retained Aryan features of pre-Christian cultus and folk-lore.

The examples given of *Beowulf* fairly represent the prevailing manner and tone of the epic in treating nature ; and, as will have been seen from the other citations made, it is also typical of the general body of verse, whether epic or lyric, of this first period. I remark here in passing that there is not in the whole poem a reference to the moon, that melancholy orb of night, — when, *à priori*, we might well expect a poet so glum-minded to take advantage of it as good material to hand. But the sadness of the Germanic bard has not a touch of sentimentalizing about it ; it is not moon-struck moaning, but the recognition of harsh fate by heroes and warriors.

The transition from the poetry of the heroic period to the monkish writings of such men as Cædmon and Cynewulf is hardly an abrupt one. The earlier vigor, raciness, and *naïveté* are not wholly lost when we come to the later verse-making ;

yet certain well-defined characteristics serve to mark off the two products, and the interpretation of nature in each case is an earmark of the change. The most primitive poetry is sung by unknown scalds, working over and retouching the original from generation to generation; modern criticism finds this to be true of Beowulf as it does of Homer. But in the transitional time we get a definite name attached to the verse product, as the poet-cowherd Cædmon, or Cynewulf, the mysterious scald of Northumbria. The subject-matter, too, changes; Cædmon making metrical paraphrases of the Old Testament, and Cynewulf shaping into narrative poems of epic dignity and scope the mediæval Christian legends. Where before was the Germanic myth unadulterated, we meet with themes borrowed from the Latin; and the older heathen fatalism, with its attendant mood of pessimism and affiliation with the darker things of the external world, makes way for the milder horoscope of the new religion, with a cheerier reflection of nature. The signs at first are somewhat chary, since the earl who invokes Thor cannot be smoothed

over into the meek-hearted Christ-lover in a trice, — and indeed the treatment of religious things by the searlier poets often reminds one of the fabled wolf in sheep's clothing; yet for this very reason a racy originality is imparted to the handling of themes traditionally dull and prosy, and the verse of religious motives has a literary value.

The names of Cædmon and Cynewulf, the first Christian poets of the English tongue, are to be associated with ecclesiastic culture, and are of moment in the evolution of the native poetry. The true successors of the harpers whose names and titles are lost in the archaic twilight of time, they were English above all else, poets before they were scholars. If their subject-matter be largely religious, and if the didactic note be struck again and again, passage after passage can be quoted which rivals the heathen song in its epic lilt and predilection for the martial and heroic. The verse of such singers may not be overlooked by the critic in his perpetual still-hunt for æsthetic pleasure.

Cædmon has been called the Saxon Milton. The appellation is not inapt;

the Puritan poet's possible obligation to his predecessor and the similarity of their treatment making the nexus all the more real; but in regard of his origin and idiosyncrasy Cædmon is rather the prototype of a modern people-poet like Burns: the one summoned from the oxstall, the other from the plough, to tell of the things of the spirit; both humble in birth and occupation, and with distinct folk-traits and sympathies. The Whitby poet sings in strong, sweet speech of the Israelitish quest of the Promised Land, or of such stirring happenings as those which centre around Judith as protagonist. And throughout his Bible-inspired epics it is curious to see the moody earnestness of the Saxon merged in the solemn, mystic-dreamy, or jubilant joy of the neophyte; this blend of character and influence coloring the touches of nature as it does other phases of the work. His verses are paraphrase in the broadest, freest sense. Whenso the singer wills, he expands, interpolates, introduces so much of local color that the composition comes to have independent and creative worth.

In Cædmon's *Genesis*, where God com-

forts Abram by telling him that his seed shall be like the stars in heaven for number, the bard amplifies the statement in this manner:

“ Behold the heavens ! Reckon their hosts,
The stars in Ether, which now in stately wise
Their lovesome beauty scatter afar,
Over the broad sea brightly ashine.”

Here a distinct, new note is struck: the heavenly lights are considered as emanations from God, the Source of light. When we hear in *Beowulf* of “God’s beautiful beacon,” Christian interpolation is at once suggested. We saw something of the typical treatment of animals in the epic: contrast therewith this tender description of the dove sent forth to find a resting-place and bring tidings of *terra firma* to the sea-weary folk. The Testament account is again laconic; the amplification such as to imply artistic appreciation of opportunity:

“ Widely she flew,
Until a gladsome rest and a fair place
Haply she found, and set her foot upon
The gentle tree. Blithe-mooded, she
Joyed that, sore-weary, she now might settle

On the branch bosky, on its bright mast.
Preening her feathers, forth she went flying
With a sweet gift, hastened to give
Straight in their hands a twig of olive,
A blade of grass."

We get here the initiative of the modern treatment. And one notices this in an Old English poet for the reason that both Cædmon and Cynewulf can on occasion paint in the sober pigments of the elder bards. The following, for example, from the *Exodus*, reminds the student forcibly of the passage already given from the ballad of *Brunanburh*, and is every whit as savage and heathen; it masses the details of a fight between Moses leading the Israelites and the hosts of Pharaoh:

"In the further sky shrieked the battle-fowls
Greedy of fight: the yellow raven,
She dewy-feathered, over the slain-in-war,
Wan Valkyrie. Wolves were a-howling
A hateful even-song, weening on food,
Pitiless beasts, full stark in murder,
In the rear heralding a meal of doomed men,
Shrieked these march-warders in the mid nights."

Turning to the fragmentary *Judith*, the irrepressible relish for a sanguinary encounter breaks out, and there is very little

of the cloistral student felt in the breathless lines which tell how the Hebrew woman slew Holofernes. One harks back to *Brunanburh*, to *Beowulf*, to such other Germanic monuments as the *Hildebrand*, or to some of the Eddic poems, in reading it. Such literature suggests how Shakespeare, child of his age for all his genius, could heap up the murders in his plays, and take so kindly to the belligerent and the bloody. The Elizabethans were three hundred years nearer the Old English than ourselves, and the first epics of our race are battle-pieces, the first *motif* is that of war. But despite the redness of *Judith* as a whole, it has a peaceful close, the final passage celebrating nature as created joyously by the Maker of men; and it could not have been written until after Augustine in the south and the Irish in the north had spoken of Christ to English folk:

“Be to the lief Lord
Glory forever, He who shaped wind and lift,
The heavens, the vast earthways, eke the wild seas
And the sun’s joys, because of His mercy.”

The accent of the heathen invocation in such a place would be very different.

Shelley is hinted and foreshadowed in more than one nature apostrophe of these early Christian poets — Shelley minus his subjectivity. The same cosmic sweep of the imagination is noticeable.

The singer's picture of the Garden of Eden in all its primal and virgin loveliness shows again an appreciation of new subject-matter :

“ The plain of Paradise
Stood good and gracious, filled full with gifts,
With fruits eternal. Lovely it glittered,
That land so mild, with waters flowing,
With bubbling springs. Never had clouds as yet
Over the roomy ways carried the rains
Wan with the winds ; but decked out with blossoms
The earth stretched away.”

In reading this verse, one is often reminded of the solecisms, anachronisms, and amusing artlessnesses of a later literary product which equals the younger in virility, the Elizabethan drama. In the strong, felicitous, and frequent use of the metaphor, also, Shakespeare and his fellows are leal descendants of the Old English, while more modern poetry has developed at the expense of the metaphor that expanded and weakened form of it known

as the simile. Stopford Brooke has pointed out that with a poet like Cædmon, a Whitby man who looked forth upon the stormy waters of the Northumbrian coast while weaving his song, it was natural he should tell of the sea with imaginative vigor and felicity, as when he sang of Noah and the flood. Mostly, as earlier, it is the serious and sombre aspects which are depicted; but it is worth noting that when we come to Cynewulf such new compounds as "sea-bright" and "seacalm" are made to portray the more amiable side of this moody monster.

Cædmon's subjects are essentially epic and grandiosely religious; in the case of Cynewulf we enter into the atmosphere of Middle-Age legend and worship, the cycle of hagiography, with an occasional excursus in the more primitive field, as in the Riddles. But by no means do the Old English qualities go by the board. If such themes as those of the *Andreas* and the *Juliana* suggest the studious cloister, the speech of the bard smacks of the soil, and there is enough of the epic and the folk-touch to prevent them from becoming scholastic and unattractive. Ten

Brinck's remark that "the introduction of Christianity was doubtless one of the causes that destroyed the productive power of epic poetry," while true in the abstract, must not be applied with strictness to Cædmon and Cynewulf; they were near enough the heroic day still to breathe its air. In the latter's *Christ*, a loosely constructed work of a choral-epic nature, which celebrates the Nativity, Ascension, and Day of Judgment, a single line gives an example of the imaginative touch in conceiving nature as a vassal, who contributes her beauty to the glory of heaven. The seraphim who sing about the throne are described, and the poet chants :

"Forever and ever, *adorned with the sky*,
They worship the Wielder ;"

the Wielder being God, who wields power over all. The italicized clause embodies a conception which has a largeness reminding one of the work of a Michael Angelo. One thinks instinctively of Milton's scene :

"Where the bright seraphim in burning row
Their loud uplifted angel trumpets blow,
And the cherubic host in thousand quires
Touch their immortal harps of golden wires."

This brief passage from the *Christ* is nobly epic and large-moving:

“ Our food He gives us and joy of goods,
Weal o’er the wide ways and weather soft
Under the skyey roof. The sun and moon,
Best-born of stars, shine they for all of us,
Candles of heaven for heroes on earth.”

There is a sound of pantheism in this, and again comes the *naïve* stroke in the epithet “heroes” where “sinners” would be the conventional later word. It took centuries of masses and missals to make the old Englishman admire the saint type more than the martial leader. Cynewulf’s *Andreas* (now by the latest theory awarded to a follower rather than to himself) is a narrative poem which describes the delivery of Matthew from a Mermedonian prison by Andrew, who dwells in Achaia, and who therefore has to make a sea journey in faring on his quest of rescue. It is full of sea pictures, and the color is that of the northeast coast of England, the singer’s presumable home. In the passage following, the saint has been borne by angels to land, and left asleep on a highway near the Mermedonian city:

“Then flew the angels, forth again faring,
Glad on the up-way their Home to seek,
Leaving the holy one there on the highroad,
Sleeping right peacefully under the heaven’s heed,
Nigh to his foemen, all the night through.
Till that the Prince suffered day’s candle
Sheerly to shine : the shades slunk away
Wan ’neath the welkin ; then came the weather’s torch,
The brilliant heaven-light o’er the homes beaming.”

Here the thought is of light driving out darkness ; it would have been more in the way of the heathen poet to give us the day swallowed up in the huge black maw of night. In the second line translated is an example of the constant perplexity of one who essays to turn Old English into more modern speech. I have retained the word “up-way” (like the German *Aufgang*) as it stands in the original, for it is certainly an admirably descriptive substantive for the airy path followed by the angelic messengers in flying back to heaven. One runs the danger of making either a bizarre effect or an obscure reading in such a case, the result being a frequent abandonment of the fine, strong, fresh Old English diction.

But not always did Cynewulf elect re-

ligious subjects; the series of remarkable Riddles, which rank among his best productions, are secular in subject, heathen in spirit, and full of the flavor of folk-lore, myth, and northern melancholy. Yet there is a divergence from the oldest epic type: the writer of these puzzle-poems has, after all, felt the amelioration of the new religion, and its influence may be traced in the lyrico-subjective position of the bard toward nature. Commingling with the feeling for the savagery of beast-kind is a certain spiritual good-fellowship which foretokens Coleridge, Byron, and Wordsworth. Beside the dark, battle-ravenous raven we see the bright, high-bred falcon associated with the aristocratic chase and the stately king-hall. In Riddle Eight the swan is thus done in rapid crayon, for the reader's guessing:

“ Silent my feather-robe when earth I tread,
Fly o'er the villages, venture the sea ;
Whilom, this coat of mine and the lift lofty
Heave me on high over the heroes' bight,
And the wide welkin's strength beareth me up
Over the folk ; my winged adornments
Go whirring and humming, keen is their song
When, freed of fetters, straightway I am
A spirit that fareth o'er flood and field.”

Riddle Fifty-eight limns a somewhat mysterious brown bird, the identification of which may perhaps be left most safely to Mr. Burroughs. Luckily, uncertainty as to name does not interfere with enjoyment of the brief, beautiful description :

“The lift upbeareth the little wights
Over the high hills : very black be they,
Swart, sallow-coated. Strong in their song,
Flockwise they fare, loud in their crying
Flit through the woody nesses, or, whiles, the stately halls
Of mortal men. Their own names they sound.”

The hint in the final line suggests whip-poor-will, Bob White, and other songsters, but the analogy is not carried out. In Old English verse nothing of the lyric or idyllic sort is more imaginative than the subjoined sketch of the nightingale, in the ninth Riddle ; it has the interpretative quality removing it far from mere detail work :

“Many a tongue I speak by mine own mouth,
In descants sing, pour out my lofty notes,
Chanting so loud, hold fast my melody,
Stay not my word, old even-singer,
But bring to earls bliss in their towers,
When for the dwellers there passioned I sing ;

Hushed in the houses sit they and hark.
How am I hight now, who with such scenic tunes
Zealously strive, calling to hero-men
Many a welcome with my sweet voice ?”

✓✓ We must make some requisition upon a
✓ long and remarkable passage from Cyne-
wulf's allegorical poem, *The Phænix*, a
piece based upon the Latin, but much
increased in volume and thoroughly Old
English. *The Phænix* is also an inter-
esting example of the allegoric use of
nature (here exemplified in the strange
bird which names the composition) in
the service of religious laudation. The
bard uses a free hand in limning the
praises of Paradise; and, on the whole,
the finest work of Cynewulf, and perhaps
of Christian poetry, in the broad style, is
embodied in the glowing and vibrant
words and cadences. Notice the Old
English conception of the Home of the
Blessed as an island. The sense of this
mid-earth as water-girdled, which is
common to the several Germanic litera-
tures, is blended in this case with that
thought of England's ocean-fretted isle
which made the greatest poet of the lan-

guage see it imaginatively as a "precious stone set in the silver sea."

"Yon plain was shining, blessed with all sweets,
With fairest fragrance the earth may yield ;
The isle stands alone, its Artist was noble,
Proud, rich in might, who stablished the mould.
Oft to the Blessed Ones is bliss of songs
Borne, and the doors of heaven opened are.
That is a winsome wold, green are the woods,
Roomy 'neath skies. Neither the rain nor snow,
Nor breath of frost, nor blast of fire,
Not the hail's drumming nor the rime's coming,
Neither the sun's heat nor bitter cold,
Neither the weather warm nor wintry storm,
May harm the wights ; but the wold lasteth
Happy and hale ; 'tis a right noble land
Woxen with blooms. Nor fells nor mountains
Steeply arise there ; nor do the stony cliffs
Beetle on high, as here midst mortals.

* * * * *
Still is that victor-wold, the sun-groves glitter,
The blissful holt. Growths do not wane,
The blades so bright ; but the trees ever
Stand greenly forth, as God has bidden,
The woods alike in winter and summer
Are hung with fruitings; never may wither
A leaf in the lift."

The faults of such descriptive writing are monotony, the repetition of stock phrases, the working over of the same

thought. Nevertheless, it has a noble manner, and a charm of diction that makes for true poetry.

I hope the survey has now been wide enough to make the reader willing to believe that the treatment of nature in Old English poetry, in this its first manifestation, is something distinct, original, and of high poetic value. It affords a welcome insight into the mind and the imagination of our Saxon predecessors, and both by what it says and leaves unsaid yields interesting testimony with regard to their attitude toward the external world of terror, power, and beauty. That attitude was vastly different from our own, more limited in perception, less enlightened, gloomier in mood, registering a state of half-development. But it had fine and characteristic points about it: the Old English imaginative vigor and grip, though largely sardonic; the creative impulse, though vibrant to coarser passions and childish on the subjective side; a poetic sense of the shifting gloom and glory of human life as voiced in nature or flashed forth in the bravery and loyalty of human kind; a pathetic appre-

ciation of the dreams and glories of religion; and a power over the mother tongue very impressive, making it to give forth grave chords of harmony to grief, to echo the wild joy of the elements, to shrill like clarions in the onset of weapons, or to soften in the mystic melodies of worship. It is manly poetry, and one cannot read it and fail to get a bracing of the mental sinews, and a larger sense of the essential qualities of one's race in their ideal aspects and deeper workings. Although we may declare without hesitation that English literature is still to-day Germanic in its backbone and vitals, nevertheless it has been subjected to so much of outside and disparate influence that, compared with the literary product of the Old English time, it is a composite thing. Hence, in getting in touch with *Beowulf* or with some of the other early lyrics and ballads, we are going back to the originals, and are given a glimpse at the substructure whereupon is built the noble edifice of our many-towered and multi-ornamented literature. The Old English lyric (such a poem as *The Scald's Lament* or *The Seafarer*) is the corner-stone; Tennyson and Browning,

Carlyle and Ruskin, Hawthorne and Longfellow, Emerson and Lowell, are the lofty terraces and gracious spires which pierce to heaven and catch the eye with rapture from afar, seeming unearthly in their aërial splendor, their proportioned and thoughtful majesty.

III WOMAN IN OLD ENGLISH POETRY



IN the literary history of the nations certain *stimuli* have always evoked imaginative expression in poetry. Certain ideals, though the times were rude, and crude the degree of civilization, have irresistibly inspired the makers of song and story. Nature is one such: Nature, with her elemental forces, her protean moods, her lovely witnesses in flower, tree, and bird, in field and sky, in mountain height and limitless stretch of far-resounding sea. Such, too, is man himself on his heroic, his martial and mythic side: blazoned in war by minstrel and weaver of epic poem; rich with the stories showing forth the valor, faith, and patriotism of humanity in a thousand perils and shifts of fate. Yet another such, and perhaps more alluring and fruitful as a motive than any other in the cycle of themes meet for the lyric and dramatic expression of all

times and peoples, is the subject of woman in all the manifold and winsome connotations of the word. The eternal feminine has lured men on from Eden's day to our own. Rob literature, rob verse of this, and you leave them poor indeed. Colonel Higginson has said that the test of a civilization is the estimate of women, suggesting the thought that the apotheosis of the sex in song is a registry of ethnic culture as well as of ethnic imagination.

On the principle of beginning the story at home, the most ancient English literary product may be examined for its treatment of woman. So may light be thrown back upon the social life of the period prior to the Norman Conquest, and a background be furnished for the later and lovelier idealizations of the female type. Nor should the quest lack genuine æsthetic value and pleasure.

The rôle of woman in Old English poetry is comparatively a scant one. This is not to be wondered at when we consider the conditions of its creation, the life it represents. Feuds and internecine strifes claimed the main strength and interest of the Anglo-Saxons of the early Chris-

tian centuries, and following hard on these came the struggle to acquire a homestead and wrest a living from the soil. In such a rude and utilitarian day, sentiment, in the modern sense, is conspicuous by its absence. With the present in mind for contrast, one is tempted to assert, in agreement with Professor Gummere, that "there was a total lack of sentiment in Germanic life," a statement including, of course, the English, although farther study and reflection suggest a modification of so sweeping a remark. But be that as it may, the few glimpses we get of woman are precious, and doubly interesting for their very rarity. At the outset we must realize that among the Old English a marriageable maiden was fought for rather than wooed, or bought from her parents for cash down instead of gracefully received of their hands. The surviving folk-customs of Germany and other European lands help to an understanding of the sternly business-like nature of these early compacts, while the modern *dot* still preserves in the centres of our civilization a tang of the original unideal practicality. The good American custom of settling things with the girl herself first

and with her father afterwards would have met with small favor in King Alfred's time and before. And while the wife and mother had a certain value as housekeeper, weaver, and child-bearer, we must wait for those twin humanizers, the church and chivalry, to set a seal on woman and to beget a notion of the mission of the eternal feminine. Another German tribe, the Franks, are said to have debated in a church assembly whether or not a woman was a human being. The ideal of the sex as seen in the poetry, therefore, must be taken in relation to what was her actual position and character at the time, with no hope of the modern refinement, the apotheosis of the centuries. Yet here, if anywhere, when treating that element in society which in any age draws out the finer deeds and aspirations of men, may we look for a softening and sweetening of the typical Old English mood and mind. Nor, examining the literary remains, are we disappointed.

Naturally it is to *Beowulf*, the one supreme epic of the Anglo-Saxon period, that one looks for the richest material in our inquiry. Half a dozen women are

mentioned in the poem, but, as is natural in a narrative poem whose *dramatis personæ* are heroes, nobles, and kings, they are all of the queenly class. One could wish that other and more varied types were depicted, and it is for this reason that we shall value the too slight references to the sex under less lofty conditions of caste to be found scattered among a few lyrics outside of *Beowulf*. By far the most interesting of the *Beowulf* passages is that which relates to Wealtheow, the spouse of Hrothgar, whose hall the hero of the song comes to guard. She is painted with gusto by the bard as a stately lady, graciously doing the courtesies of her high station, at all points a pleasing exemplar of the house-regent and hostess for her royal thane. It will be well to translate into English blank verse the lines which tell of her and her service. The scene is in the great hall Heorot (which we may render as Stag Horn) wherein the war heroes of the king and those of Beowulf are feasting, drinking, singing, and laughing, in the hope that with the advent of the Danish Beowulf the dread of the dragon Grendel shall pass away. To them,

in the midst of their heartsome revelry,
enter the queen :

“ Forth came Queen Wealtheow,
Of Hrothgar wife, mindful of what was meet,
Greeting the gold-decked heroes in the hall ;
The high-born woman gave the banquet cup
First to the warder of the East-Dane homes,
Bade him be blithe at drinking, he so dear
Unto his folk ; right joyous he partook
Of plate and beaker, battle-famous king.
And then the Helmung’s lady walked among
The veterans and the striplings, each and all,
Proffering the jewelled cups until it happed
The queen ring-wreathen unto Beowulf
Mannerly-mooded bore the mead-cup full,
Greeted the Geat’s prince and gave thanks to God
(Wise in her words) because she had her will,
That she might pin her faith upon an earl
Who was an aid in evil. He, meanwhile,
The battle-brave, received it at her hands
And made a song, though in the weeds of war.

The woman liked the words he spake full well,
The boasting of the Geat ; the gold-decked one,
The folk-queen noble, by her lord sat down.”

Certainly this is a pleasing free-hand description of a woman on her social and public side. We observe that mannerliness, *savoir vivre*, a carriage and etiquette befitting her station, were deemed goodly

things for such a person to cultivate and possess. Indeed, this glimpse of courtly life reminds one more strongly of the late Minnesinger period, of the chivalric figures who make festal and alive the *Nibelungen*, than of a younger and comparatively barbaric day. This may be in part explained by the inevitable idealization of poetry. The picture here is selective, heightened from the truth. Further along in the epic occurs another scene in which Wealtheow again bears the beaker to the king, calls him "lord and protector," and bids him be generous of his gifts to Beowulf. A valuable passage for our purpose is that which contrasts the characters of the two queens, Hygd and Thrytho. The former, Hygd, is the wife of the Geat Higelac, Beowulf's king, and is drawn as the pattern of what a good woman should be in such a stead. Thrytho, contrariwise, is the epitome of bad qualities, as seen through the lenses of the early poet, a sort of Lady Macbeth of the early Middle Ages. The passage may be given:

" Right young was Hygd,
His wife, well-natured too, despite that she

Full few of years had bided in the burgs,
 Daughter of Hareth ; not familiar she,
 Nor yet too close of gifts to Geatish folk,
 Of costly trinkets."

So far the bright side. It is worth noting that the bard commends Hygd for her queenly dignity, not allowing herself to be on too free-and-easy terms with those whom she outranks. He hastens to say, however, that she is all right in the main thing; namely, prodigal in dispensing her largesses of gold and gems. Throughout Old English literature this attribute is praised again and again by the poets, whether true of lords or ladies. Thus the stock phrase applied to free-handed earls and kings is "ring-dispenser." But now for the limning of the less admirable sister queen, Thrytho, a name, by the way, that falls anything but trippingly from the tongue and seems ill-adapted to the music of poetry, to which the reply is that the elder English verse-makers cared little for consonantal difficulties—were less sensitive to musical effects than is the case with their modern commensals. This lady, then, is spouse to the Angle king, Offi, and appears to be lugged in

solely for a foil to the virtues of the young Hygd:

“Thrytho’s mood was wroth,
The haughty folk-queen, evil was her mind,
No bold one in the trusted retinue
Durst venture (save her lawful lord alone)
To look into her eyes on any day;
For sorry death-chains she would lay on him
Hand-wrought; and soon thereafter, hand-fights o’er,
Were weapons ready. So that hostile swords
Must be the arbiters and murders make.
Such is no queenly custom, nowise fit
For lady’s doing, though she peerless be,
That she, peace-weaver, take the mortal life
Of some dear liegeman for a fancied slight.”

How such a portrait makes us feel the distance of this civilization from ours! What a very termagant is here revealed to us—a woman terrible to face, like a blood-thirsty animal for quarrel and killing, ungovernable in her passions, a stirrer-up of tribal troubles, and altogether dreadful! That such a wolfish disposition did not seem by any means so awful to a contemporary as it does to us, is pretty sure. Women’s names in general, from the fifth to the fourteenth century, throw light on this, for they are

often grimly truculent; witness, Krimhild (Battle-mask) and Brunhild (Battle-coat) in the *Nibelungen*; Sigrum (Battle-rime) in the Norse Saga; and Hildeburg (Battle-town) and Beadohild (Battle-maid) in different Old English songs. In the lines just translated the beautiful epithet, "peace-weaver," applied reproachfully to Thrytho for her lack in the suggested qualities, is an oft-recurring expression for women, especially those of high or royal rank. It might be inferred carelessly that members of the sex were regarded typically as white doves of gentleness in character. It is believed by scholars, however, that this sobriquet was not so subjective as this, but rather had reference to the frequent part played by woman when given in marriage between hostile tribes, peace being patched up thereby, to last for a longer or shorter time. Even with this explanation, a seemly part to play, even a beautiful, whether in the bluff days of war or in the piping times of peace; the sense of the innate feminine gentleness is present plainly in the poet's remark that such-like behavior was neither queenly nor womanly. On the whole, though, we may feel assured

that the hints of savagery in such a character as the Walkyrie Brunhild hit nearer the mark than a milder type like Krimhild; that Thrythos were quite as common as Hygds.

The reference to Queen Hildeburg, consort of King Finn, of the Jutes, is interesting because it touches on that always sweet thing, mother and brother love. There is a feud between the Danes, led by Hraef, and the Jutes, and Hildeburg has the misfortune to be a kinswoman of Hraef, who is killed in the conflict, Finn, too, being slain later himself. So the poor queen is in a hard case, having her nearest and dearest on both sides in the quarrel, — a situation sometimes duplicated in our American civil war. The bard says of her:

“ All blameless she,
Yet in the shield-play shorn of those most lief,
Of bairns and brothers ; wounded by the spears,
By fate they fell — a sorry woman she.”

And a little later on is told how she had child and brother burned together on one funeral pyre, this disposition of the dead recalling classic scenes:

“ Then bade them Hildeburg her own dear son
To fasten in the flames on Hraef, his pyre ;
Wretched she wept upon his shoulder there,
Bemoaned with wailing songs.”

That is a fine touch of mother love again, when Higelac, in his praise of Beowulf the deliverer, declares that it was a lucky woman who begot such a man :

“ Lo, whatsoever woman of the tribes
Among mankind begot the child, if so
She liveth yet, may soothly say, to her
The Ancient Measurer hath gracious been
Of son birth.”

Another and a final sketch of the female type in *Beowulf* is that of Freaware, the winsome daughter of Hrothgar. Like to her mother, she is represented as playing Ganymede to the revellers in Stag Horn, the lofty hall crowned with deer antlers, and in her person the poet once more exemplifies the function of the sex in allaying bad blood and uniting warring tribes :

“ Whilom did Hrothgar's daughter to the earls,
To all the soldiery in order due,
The ale-filled vessels bear. Freaware the name
I heard her called by some. And there she gave
The studded gems to heroes. She is plight

Young, gold-adorned, to Froda's happy son,
The scylding's lord hath said *Amen* to this,
The Kingdom's ward, and reckons it for rede
That he through her may soothe a deal of woe,
Of slaughterous feuds."

But we learn in the next canto that, as not seldom happens, the intertribal trouble thus appeased by the union of Freaware and Ingild was renewed, when after a season (alas! the inconstancy of human nature) the husband's wife-love had cooled down in the face of overwhelming cares.

So much for woman as she gleams transiently on the canvas in the greatest of our Old English heroic poems. Pleasing, on the whole, are these portraits, showing her in the heartfelt relations of kin and family; as the tactful hostess, recalling Chaucer's Nun, since

"In curtesie was set full moche her leste ;"

as one pouring oil upon the troublous waters of war. Here is testimony that the influence which has done so much for the refinement and amelioration of society was here at work, albeit under stern restrictions of time and place. We may now supplement the Beowulfian material with

the shreds and patches of poetic hint and statement to be found in minor poems of the primary and heathen period.

In the earliest lyric, *The Scald's Lament*, one of the six strophes which compose it tells of the sad plight of one Beadhild, daughter of Nithad and Leman of Weland, the mythic smith of Germanic legend. Having loved not wisely but too well, she is left lonely to bear the burden of her misstep. The poet describes her case in this wise:

“ Her brother's death to Beadhild never sunk
So deep in mind as did her own sore stead,
That she perforce must know it for a truth
How she was eaning, and could nowise tell
What she might do.”

From this passage it may be inferred at least that unchastity was frowned upon and purity among women set store by with the English long before the Norman Conquest. The word of Tacitus as to the Germans is in agreement with this idea, the eulogy, of course, applying as well to a sister tribe like the Anglo-Saxons, a later offshoot from the Continent. The strong clan and kin feeling of the Germanic

peoples was all in favor of the feminine virtue which in time has come to be regarded as the touchstone of female excellence. A passage in the lyric *Widsith* is similar to several cited in *Beowulf*, in that it depicts a queen as gracious gold-giver. The Wanderer (*Widsith*) is the typical figure of the Old English scald travelling from land to land, attaching himself to some king or over-lord, and making his heroic songs of the chief's prowess, to receive in return sure meed of gift and food and a vassal's privilege in hall and by hearthstone. But in the end the bard feels that his princely patron will win immortality by his lay and so get no mean reward in his turn, just as Shakespeare in his sonnet feels that he is bestowing enduring fame upon the boy he lauds and loves; as Dante was sure he was embalming for after ages the stately beauty of Beatrice. This strolling songman, now, has been telling how on his wanderings King Ermanaric, of the Goths, gave him of rings and money which he, faithful liegeman that he was, on his coming back put into the hands of his patron and lord, Eadgils, actuated by gratitude because that

ruler had bestowed an estate upon his father before him, which the Wanderer in due course inherited. But another land-holding, he goes on, was given him by good Queen Ealdhild, the spouse of Eadgils:

“ Ealdhild herself to me another gave,
The stately queen unto the liegeman, she
Was Edwin’s daughter; praise of her was borne
Through many lands whenso my songs were sung,
Of how I saw her fair beneath the sky,
The gold-adorned dispensing of her gifts.”

This again is pleasing and implies an attractive feudal relation. It does not have the hollow ring of the perfunctory court poetry of subsequent centuries, when the vices of a royal personage were chanted as virtues, and the pimples on his face apostrophized as suitable subject-matter for the Muse!

A mysterious but very suggestive poem is that called *The Wife’s Lament*, a lyric of fifty odd lines, in which a woman who seems to be exiled from her husband and is bewailing her fate pours out her lonesome soul in an authentically deep-hearted way. Grief, and the honest

attempt at its expression, is the same the world over and time on end. Even in the part paraphrase herewith offered somewhat of this, I trust, may be felt:

“Lonesome, I make this song full sorrowfully
About my fate ; and I am fain to tell
How I have bided grief since I was born ;
Grief new and old, but never more than now.

Erstwhile, my lord fared hence from midst his kin
Over the strife of billows ; night-care then
Was mine, to know what country might be his.

My lord he bade me here make mine abode,
But in this landstead I had naught of bliss,
Of trusty friends. Wherefore my mood is sad.

Full oft we wagered in the days ago
That naught save death itself should sever us
From one another. Ah, how all is changed !
It is as if it were not, friendship ours !

Full oft am I
Grown bitter o'er the leaving of my love.
Somewhere on earth my friends are living lief,
They lie in beds — while I at dawn must go
Lonely beneath my oak-tree in the clove
And sit there all the summerlong day and weep
My wretched woes, my many miseries.
For that I may not rest me from my cares,
My homesick longings which begirt my life.

Woe to the wight that must abide her Dear
With sad desire."

There is little that is temporal in the accent of this sorrow. It is what we hear alike in the Song of Solomon, the Greek dramatists, the Elizabethan lyrics, and the Tennysonian Idyls of the King. It has the dignity and directness of an elemental emotion. The setting, the incidents, only half revealed and shadowy, are of minor importance. But we may notice the characteristic Germanic flavor of the lay in the manner in which the feeling for kin and home is interblent with the love of husband, furnishing a congruous background to the closer, keener woe. The woman is a "wretch" — the word signifies etymologically one exiled from the native land — and this thought and fact enters into and intensifies her misery.

The poetry so far drawn upon has been heathen, pre-Christian in both theme and treatment. With the beginning of the Christian verse one would expect, naturally, a change in the depiction of woman under idealized literary forms; an approximation to the modern view. The humanizing influence of the more gentle religion

would tend to effect this, especially in a faith which elevates Mary to so lofty a place as co-equal with her divine Son. But the poetical remains are somewhat disappointing in this respect during the true Anglo-Saxon period, say up to the twelfth century. This is in part explained by the subject-matter of the epics and lyrics, mostly monk-made and inspired by biblical or hagiographical literature. Cædmon and Cynewulf based their work upon the Old Testament, or upon some of the many legends of the church. Hence either the female element is scant, or the types are conventional and prescribed by the material. Again, it needs time before a new religion can take deep hold of the imagination and display itself in literature. The old heathen admiration for power and bravery in woman rather than the so-called womanly qualities of modern civilization, breaks out now and then and offers an amusing illustration of the clinging to earlier, coarser ideals. The attitude toward the Virgin expressed in the popular line,

“ Mary mother, meek and mild,”

so common in later mediæval song, can-

not be found at this time, and a woman-type of the Middle Ages, like Heloïse, is still centuries away. The treatment of the sex still best relished by the singers is exhibited in the way a vigorous and picturesque poet seizes on the Apocryphal story of Judith and Holofernes and makes that belligerent maiden protagonist in scenes he thoroughly appreciates and, be it confessed, commends. At the same time, the changes from the Hebrew narrative are revelatory of the Germanic ideals; Judith is converted from a wealthy widow into a virgin of glittering loveliness; very beautiful, if Walkyrish in her battle mood. These naïve transpositions and adaptations constitute the most interesting and subtle part of the story of the Old English woman creation in the early Christian literature. This one illustration may serve for the whole class in indicating the favorite type in this verse, although the new religion nominally was accepted. I take up the story where the heroine, having beheaded the heathen ruler in the tent scene, returns with her attendant to her own city, Bethalia, wearing the grisly trophy :

“And so had Judith speeded in the feud
Most gloriously, as God had given her ;
And now, wise maid, she quickly brought the head
All bloody of the warrior in a sack,
The which her damsel (fair-cheek girl was she
Of gentle breeding) to the mistress dear
Had thither fetched ; and gave it in her hand
Wound-sodden, for to bear it home : so did
Mistress to maid. Then swiftly sped away
The twain, both women valorous of mind,
Till they had left — these much enheartened ones
Now happy — far behind the hostile host,
And plainly saw Bethalia’s winsome walls
Shine in the sun, fair city.”

They reach the gates, are welcomed by
the warder, enter the town, and there is
general rejoicing at the good news which
Judith brings :

“And then the wise, the gold-bedeckèd one
Of mindful mood, did bid them straight unroll
The heathen war-man’s head and show it for
A sign unto the burghers, how that she
Had prospered in the battle ; then she spoke,
The high-born maid, unto the people all :
‘ O heroes victor-famed, behold ye here,
Ye leaders all, this loathliest of men,
Of heathen battle kings, his head a-stare !
Unloving Holofernes, it is he.
Who of all men against us most has wrought
Of murders and sore sorrows and would eke

Them out yet further : but God granted him
 No longer life, nor let him harass us
 With harms ; for I have overborne the Prince
 Through God, his might. Now would I call upon
 Each man of you, each dweller in the burg,
 Shield warriors, that ye, forth-soon as you may,
 Do fit you for the fight ; so soon as God
 The Maker, goodly King, doth from the east
 Send leaping light, bear out the linden shields,
 The battle-boards for bodies and for breasts,
 Keen helmets, for to fell amongst the foe
 Folk-leaders, with your gay ensanguined swords,
 The fated chiefs. Those fiends are doomed to death,
 And ye shall win the day, the glory, too,
 As God the mighty has betokened you
 Through this my hand."

This is a ringing virile exhortation to arms, a cry that might have come from a Joan of Arc of an earlier day. *Judith's* fierce mood has in it the leaven of righteousness, notice. She likes war, evidently, but she loves God, and fights the Assyrians to His glory. Herein she differs from a type like Thrytho, and marks the sublimation to a degree of a primitive and strenuously earthly passion.

I wish I might in closing give one or two representative selections in the lyric and hence, perhaps, more pleasing vein, but to remain within the Old English

domain, and do so, is not easy. When we pass into the Middle English period, lyric song begins with full chorus and a morning freshness; but that takes us beyond the present quest. The passages already adduced give a fair idea of the types and ideals of woman in the first and oldest English poetry, with its peculiar defects and virtues. An indefiniteness of personal characterization or portraiture will have been noticed in these examples of the feminine rôle in our native song of the remote past. Description, minute and physical, of these old-time queens and ladies fair we have found little of; outline sketches they are; pastelles, if you will, and the figures are almost as vague as those shades in Hades whom Virgil perceived to cast no shadows. Yet so much the more is left to the imagination, and remembering how long they have been "dust and ashes," what a vast evolution, social, ethical, psychologic, lies between them and us, and how verily alive and picturesque they were indubitably in their day and generation, one waxes sympathetic toward them, after all, and drops into the mood of Villon's "*Mais où sont les neiges*

d'antan?" One quotes in dreamy reminiscence the lines wherein Browning broods over and bids good-by to the vanished ladies of another clime and time:

"Dear dead women, with such hair too: what's become of all the gold
Used to hang and brush their bosoms? I feel chilly
and grown old."



Washington Irving's Services to American History





* WASHINGTON IRVING'S SERVICES TO AMERICAN HISTORY



WHEN a writer has won the title of the Father of American Literature — a name conventionally given to Washington Irving — it becomes plain that he is very important as a figure in our native development in letters. His contribution was indeed great. With the century only just begun and our republic less than twenty years in working order, he did work as essayist and story-teller challenging contrast with the best in the same kinds in England, and became not only a great American author, but a personage admired, lauded, and loved in European lands as a literary and social force of his day. This seems all the more noteworthy when we realize the adverse conditions under which a man of letters had to

* Originally given as a lecture at the Old South Church, Boston, in one of the historical courses conducted yearly in that place.

struggle at that time. Here was a New York lad of middle-class Scotch-English parentage, reared to a business life and harassed for years by mercantile failure, lacking a classical or college education, and living in a city of whose deficiency in the amenities of art, literature, and society we get a clear picture in Mr. Warner's monograph on Irving. There was little there to nurse genius like Irving's. Politics and law were the only apparent career for the ambitious youth. It is estimated that in 1822 there were not more than ten men of letters of repute in this land. Nevertheless, being of a gay, social nature and having as the gift of the gods the literary instinct and bias strongly marked and perseveringly developed, he was able to win a well-founded fame, and even at that early day draw the attention of the mother country to the United States as a part of the English-speaking race henceforth to be reckoned with in literature.

Irving had fewer rivals then than he would have had to-day — granted; otherwise the conditions were all against him. Yet we have to skip to Emerson if we would get a name at all worthy to be set

along with his as a writer. It is worth mentioning, in view of our special theme, Irving's part in American history, that at the period when he began to write—in 1807, say, the date of the *Salmagundi* papers—the impulse of the native author to follow English traditions in letters was well-nigh irresistible, infinitely stronger than it is at the present time. Yet Irving, while in works like *Bracebridge Hall* he is essentially an English essayist, in his best, most characteristic work used native material and showed himself a very American, and so made American literature.

We must realize the scanty encouragement of his environment and the noble way he used near-at-hand, familiar, and hence despised material, in order to come to an understanding of the man, the writer, the historian. For it is as historian that I would deal with him here; which leads me to say that Washington Irving stands somewhat apart from our other native historians. We think of him primarily as a literary man, an essayist, story-maker, and humorist. The literary quality was strong, of course, in men like Prescott, Motley, and Parkman, but never-

theless they were first and foremost writers of history. Irving, despite the fact that he wrote several books of importance in that field, may almost be said to have written history by the way, to have been side-tracked into it; or if that is putting it too strong, there is no danger in the statement that our writer will be longest remembered by his non-historical works — by genial sketches like *Rip Van Winkle* and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, and by a masterpiece of mock-heroic humor like *The History of New York*, whose alleged author was that mysterious little Dutchman, Diedrich Knickerbocker, a name so rich in connotation, so firmly embedded in the popular mind. And yet Washington Irving, for the very reason that he was what he was, a man of letters, *par excellence*, whose notable qualities are sentiment and humor, was able to leave some valuable suggestions to all historians in his methods, and to introduce into that kind of writing certain characteristics that give it salt and savor. It is not alone books like his *Life of Washington* and his *Life of Columbus* that constitute his contribution to American history; nor is the whole

story told when we add the books on exotic themes, like the *Alhambra*, *Conquest of Granada*, and *Legends of The Conquest of Spain*, where he set an example, in a day when the native historian was a *rara avis*, of the adequate treatment of large inspirational themes from whatever source. No, those *Sketch Book* stories and the Knickerbocker History — that sportive thing, a confessed *jeu d'esprit* — must be counted in as contributory and, to my mind, important. Let me show what I mean, by going a little into the details of what I deem to be Irving's crowning virtues in historical composition.

But first a preliminary remark, to the effect that Washington Irving must be judged, as indeed all men must be, in the setting of his time. Viewed in relation to current production in history or to what had already been done, he is seen to have possessed the instinct and habit of the true historian, the modern workman. I mean that he went to the sources and spared neither time nor labor in getting together his materials. Witness the years spent in the libraries and other repositories of Spain, when he was working on his

Columbus and other main books. The result is that, in spite of the enormous amount of research since expended upon the Italian whose name is associated with our country's discovery, the Irving biography is confessedly a standard one to-day, and this quite aside from its great literary merits. The method of Irving, at the beginning of this century, is essentially that of the present—something quite different, for example, from the method of Jared Sparks, whose biographies were later in time. This consideration—Irving's natural critical insight, as well as his thorough-going habits in preparation for historical writing—is no slight one, and must be counted to his credit. His apparent indolence in the intermittent periods of idleness between his works should mislead no one into thinking him a careless workman.

But it is chiefly to the more literary features of the work that I wish to call attention, as marking Irving among our historians. What are they? In the first place, his was a mind naturally retrospective, loving to brood upon the past of his own and other countries, and sensitive to

the romance therein to be discovered. All he wrote is explained in this way. He brooded on the Hudson, and Rip Van Winkle and Ichabod Crane are the result; on Old New York, and the comic Dutchman is evolved for all time; on Old English customs and types, and *Bracebridge Hall* springs into being; on the vanished dramas, glories, and heroics of Spain, and the Spanish books follow in train. In a word, he had imagination in reconstructing by-gone scenes and events, a faculty without which the historian is likely to be a Dr. Dryasdust, necessary, useful, but unlovely.

But right here we get into deep water with Irving, for certain criticisms are inevitable. How can a work like the Knickerbocker History be praised as history? The full-length of the Dutchman therein drawn is not portraiture, but caricature; the style is not serious, but serio-comic. And the worst of it is, that figure, broad of beam, slow of speech, surrounded with a fog of tobacco and much given to sleep and heavy eating, has been indelibly impressed upon us by the author's genius, so that to this day the word Dutchman, in

spite of our better knowledge, is surcharged with these humoristic associations. This may be, and is, a triumph of art and a distinct addition to humor; but is it not injurious to history proper, and incidentally hard on the Dutchman? Professor Brander Matthews, for one, regrets that Irving should have "echoed the British scoffs at the Dutch," though admitting that there was "no malice in his satire." Yet in closing his sketch of this author he boldly declares that his greatest work is the Knickerbocker legend. This sounds like a paradox, but it can be explained; and, I think, without going so far as Professor Matthews, we may concede that the Knickerbocker History is, in a broad sense, a contribution, if not to history, to the sympathetic appreciation of America's historic past — and if that be not history, it is hard to name it. A book that vitalizes, even in the way of fun, our earlier records and doings, that draws attention to, and makes interesting the types and scenes of, pioneer days, indirectly does good. It creates an atmosphere favorable to farther investigation. It makes a tradition of descent and keeps alive a sense of ancestry.

Think how proudly a modern New York family points to Knickerbocker forbears ; and pride and interest in ancestry is one of the safeguards of self-conscious historic continuity. Approaching the subject with the bias of a poor, simple-minded literary man, despite the historical critics, Irving's chief work of humor seems to me to have been most fruitful for histories yet to come, to have fertilized the soil, making it genial and rich.

And then, again, he did a great service in his use of native legend. What ! you say ; can any claim of history-making be awarded to stories of a village vagabond like Rip or goblin-haunted Yankee like Ichabod ? Surely such-like tales have no more historical foundation than the Connecticut Blue Laws or the snakes in Ireland. Ah, but softly ! The Hudson river is one of the noble and beautiful American streams ; but when you think of it, do you suppose it is no more to you than it was prior to the day when Irving gave it atmosphere ? It is quite another thing. Before, it was a majestic water-lane, more than rivalling the Rhine in natural beauty. Now it is that same river

seen through the mellow light of romance and legendry. It partakes of the glamour which that famed German river has for us by reason of its nixies, its castles, and its vineyards, with a story in every grape. Irving set the seal of the poetic imagination upon the Hudson; and that is a great thing to do for us. He gave it a background, perspective, human interest. When I think of it, I see old Heinrich Hudson blundering up stream and expecting to find the passage to China; Hudson, that seaman of renown, who "laid in abundance of gin and sauerkraut" and allowed every man "to sleep quietly at his post unless the wind blew;" Hudson, whom it is impossible not to have an affection for after you have met him with Rip on the mountain. He is, thanks to Irving, a good deal more than a mere two-legged peg to hang a date on. And so we, too, after Hudson, course up the river of his name, and dream of it, while sun or shower makes shifting lures of light upon the Palisades and Highlands and the summer storms reverberate among the crags of the Catskills, as the river of a day when wild beasts roamed the woods

and moccasined hunters camped beside the waters.

It is much to be wished that the movement which was talked of last year to purchase Sunnyside, Irving's historic home on the banks of the Hudson, and preserve it as a literary landmark, might be vigorously pushed to success. Nor is it the river's panorama alone that we see with the eye of imagination, optic revelation more magical than all your kinetoscopes and vitascopes. We behold New York City in the days when the Bowery — name that now conjures up unsavory thoughts of second-hand clothing and the unwashed of divers nations — was a green lane dotted with pleasant suburban residences, each with its bower. We walk the grass-grown ways of Albany, where the cows sway home at evenfall and dutifully stop before the front door for milking, not, as the higher educated modern cow might do, before the town pump, for purposes of dilution. We get charming interiors of prosperous, hospitable Dutch country homes, which Irving drew with a fidelity to detail as if in emulation of the manner of the old Dutch masters themselves;

homesteads nestled in a valley among high hills or perched upon some slightly eminence commanding a wide aerial sweep of blue water and bluer mountain — the homely, hearty life that teemed there and is passed away forever, yet not before our author caught its spirit and embalmed it for us in his books. We read with quickened pulses of Captain Kidd and his buried treasure, of the storm ship's dire warning to river navigators; we ride with Tom Walker and the Devil, and are made familiar with many another legend born of that unsophisticated age. And let us not forget that the author in saturating himself with all this folk-lore and these legends did yeoman service to history, since they are part of it, being the facts about the imagination of a people, quite as important as a register of their inner lives as elections are of their outer actions. Nor must we overlook, in thinking of the study he gave native themes, that he wrote a book called *A Tour of the Prairies*, based on his own travels, and at the time by far the best account of Western wild life in existence, but less typically expressive of the man, because others have done

so much since in exploiting that region; to mention one work, Parkman's *The Oregon Trail*, came not long after. But this represents Irving's minor activity, because his writings about old New York life came not of knowledge gathered on a tourist's trip, but from the affectionate intimacy of a lifetime. He knew New York through and through, loved it, and so was at his happiest in telling of it.

Nay, Irving not only in his works, but in his own person and environment, adds a richness to our history; for does not his own Sunnyside at Tarrytown, the house and home he loved so dearly and came back to so gladly from foreign wanderings, there to pass a tranquil and honored old age, — does not that place lend a poetic interest to the stream it overlooks and helps to make illustrious? Yes, by his work and his life Washington Irving did his share in a subtle, but very real and deep sense in making America historic, in giving its past days light, flavor, reality, loveliness. This is the reason why one has a right to claim that Irving performed a service for our history in his work which

is not technically and formally included in his histories and biographies.

But looking now to his work as a whole and inclusive of the more serious and sustained labor he put upon the *Columbus* and other like books, I remark that their manner, their style or literary quality, has an attraction not always found in even great historians, but wheresoever found a good thing. Here is the advantage of having a man of letters do such work. The result is he is readable, has interest, charm; and there is no harm in the history writer giving pleasure — especially if he have thoroughness and be conscientious. It may even be doubted if there can be much fruitful stimulation from history without this pleasurable interest. Certainly it should be furnished to young people beginning the study. And largely for that reason Irving is a capital writer for those who want to get a start, to acquire an appetite for this sort of food, which as set before you by some historians will stick in your throat, or if swallowed give you an indigestion. It is a puzzle where Irving got his literary touch from. His folk were not of that sort, his

education was desultory; yet he has it on every page — an easy elegance, a flush of color, a music of ordered sentences. The style strikes us to-day as a bit old-fashioned, perhaps as rather rhetorical; but then so will our style strike a critic half a century or more hence in the same way, as likely as not. Professor Beers, of Yale, quotes this passage and remarks that we read it with a "certain impatience":

"As the vine, which has long twined its graceful foliage about the oak and been lifted by it into sunshine, will, when the hardy plant is rifted by the thunderbolt, cling round it with its caressing tendrils and bind up its shattered boughs, so is it beautifully ordered by Providence that woman, who is the mere dependent and ornament of man in his happier hours, should be his stay and solace when smitten with sudden calamity, winding herself into the rugged recesses of his nature, tenderly supporting the drooping head, and binding up the broken heart."

Well, that smacks of the Latin in construction, is somewhat ponderous, be it confessed, and deliciously antiquated in its conception of the fair sex. Irving, a gen-

tleman of the old school, a bachelor with a soft spot under his waistcoat for pretty and good and gracious ladies, knew nothing about the New Woman—and we must not blame him for that; it was his misfortune, not his fault. And, again, this selection is not typical of him; it shows old-fashioned qualities in excess of his habit. It were fairer to take a passage like the following, which is normal in its quiet felicity:

“About six miles from the renowned city of the Manhattoes, in that sound or arm of the sea which passes between the mainland and Nassau, or Long Island, there is a narrow strait, where the current is violently compressed between shouldering promontories and horribly perplexed by rocks and shoals. Being, at the best of times, a very violent, impetuous current, it takes these impediments in mighty dudgeon, boiling in whirlpools, brawling and fretting in ripples, raging and roaring in rapids and breakers, and, in short, indulging in all kinds of wrong-headed paroxysms. At such times, woe to any unlucky vessel that ventures within its clutches. This termagant humor, how-

ever, prevails only at certain times of tide. At low water, for instance, it is as pacific a stream as you would wish to see; but as the tide rises, it begins to fret; at half-tide, it roars with might and main, like a bull bellowing for more drink; but when the tide is full, it relapses into quiet and, for a time, sleeps as soundly as an alderman after dinner. In fact, it may be compared to a quarrelsome toper, who is a peaceable fellow enough when he has no liquor at all or when he has a skinfull, but who when half seas over plays the very devil. This mighty, blustering, bullying, hard-drinking little strait was a place of great danger and perplexity to the Dutch navigators of ancient days — hectoring their tub-built barks in a most unruly style, whirling them about in a manner to make any but a Dutchman giddy, and not unfrequently stranding them upon rocks and reefs, as it did the famous squadron of Oloffte the Dreamer when seeking a place to found the city of Manhattoes. Whereupon, out of sheer spleen, they denominated it Helle-gat, and solemnly gave it over to the devil. This appellation has since been aptly rendered into English by

the name of Hell-gate and into nonsense by the name of Hurlgate, according to certain foreign intruders, who neither understood Dutch nor English — may St. Nicholas confound them !”

His manner of writing as a whole, in its unobtrusive breeding and beauty, is admirable, and may well be put before us as a model of the kind of effect it aims for. It is especially valuable at the present time for its lack of strain, its avoidance of violence or bizarre effects, when our later writers incline to hunt for startling words and queer constructions ; anything to excite and seem “original.” Irving’s style impresses one as a whole, rather than in particulars, — and that is the higher art.

For another thing — Irving makes his work vivid by his realization of scene and character, which is, I should suppose, a literary characteristic. We have already seen how he did this in handling native material, old New York life, the Hudson river, and so forth. All his work illustrates the quality. And with it goes what may be called true idealism in the treatment of events and men ; by which I do not mean falsifying facts, but a broad

comprehension of the main idea in an historical act or personage. Take Columbus: The danger of conceiving him is that he become to us a mere figurehead, a fleshless embodiment of the abstract notion of discovery. Every great man in the past runs this risk. It is the same with George Washington: he is a hackneyed pattern-plate to the school-boy, or was until latter-day historians like McMaster began to insist on turning our attention away from the cherry-tree and toward a flesh-and-blood Virginia gentleman, great, but having like passions with ourselves. Compare the estimates of Washington by Bancroft and McMaster, if you would see the difference, and then realize that it is only the latter portrait (the one making the Father of his Country alive) which you can warm up to and love. Now, if you will read Irving's final chapter in his *Columbus*, where he sums up the Italian's character, you will find it impossible not to be fired by the sketch; it is vital; the explorer is revealed as a splendid figure, food for poetry, romance, idealization, yet not faultless, not a pale, mysterious piece of perfection. In a word,



Irving's method is that of sympathy, of love, of the historic imagination. That is why Mark Twain has in his *Joan of Arc*, with whatever anachronisms and lapses from the pattern, done something for the historical study of the Maid — because he is stimulated in imagination by her, sees her, loves her, realizes her greatness, and makes us feel it. Whoever does this performs a high function for history; and beyond all peradventure Washington Irving had this virtue in his *Columbus* and elsewhere.

In newspaper life we speak of the reporter's city article about a murder or a fire or a Christian Endeavor meeting — no matter what the subject — as a "story." That is the technical word to describe his work. It is significant. It implies the feeling that his report must first of all have graphic power, be picturesque, dramatic; that is, story-like, showing life in small, being an epitome of the human play, in some phase of it. The newspaper men know that the public wants news in this shape — piquant, warm, sensational; and so the best reporter is he who can tell the best story, without de-

parting from the facts. Sometimes and on some papers, I regret to say, the journalist, in the strain after this taking dramatic interest, tells a story in a double sense, and so journalism is brought into disrepute.

Now, Irving, among historians, has the story-telling gift, in a good sense. Mr. Warner has pointed out that Washington Irving introduced the short story into English; and this talent for narration in brief he carries over into his long and serious historical compositions. This comes from his interest in personalities and his sense of the picturesque and dramatic—that talent which I hope I do not belittle in calling journalistic, for in its purity it is legitimate and valuable. I am willing to grant that sometimes this tendency led Irving into danger. For example, in his *Conquest of Granada*, a book where his literary power is at its best, he puts descriptions of *bona fide* events into the mouth of a fictitious cavalier chronicler, mingling fact and fancy in such a way as to give the reader a sense of unsure footing. This certainly cannot be defended as a method. Yet it is very sure that this history gets its color and movement

and picture quality in large measure from the author's ability to tell a story, for history is full of stories to tell, if the historian but sees them and can put them before us.

Still another quality which goes to make Irving pleasant as well as profitable reading, and which we may call characteristic of the literary man rather than of the historian, is his humor. This is not confined to the Knickerbocker History and lightsome sketches like *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, but plays like heat lightning about the graver books, with a gentle lambency which makes them distinctlier remembered and longer enjoyed. Take the same *Conquest of Granada*, and hear the closing paragraph:

"Thus terminated the war of Granada, after ten years of incessant fighting, equaling (says Fray Antonio Agapida) the far-famed siege of Troy in duration, and ending like that in the capture of the city. Thus ended also the dominion of the Moors in Spain, having endured 778 years, from the memorable defeat of Roderick, the last of the Goths, on the banks of the Guadalete. The authentic

Agapida is uncommonly particular in fixing the epoch of this event. This great triumph of our holy Catholic faith, according to his computation, took place in the beginning of January, in the year of our Lord 1492, being 3,655 years from the population of Spain by the Patriarch Tubal, 3,797 from the general deluge, 5,453 from the creation of the world, according to Hebrew calculation, and in the month of Rabic, in the 897th year of the Hegira, or flight of Mahomet, — whom may God confound! saith the pious Agapida!"

With this facetious marshalling of dubious dates does Irving, in a mood of cheer perhaps begotten of the fact that his work was finished, take leave of the reader; and the mood is not unique by any means. The Muse of History is represented as a grave maiden; it would be incongruous to fancy her sitting with backward-gazing eye, cracking jokes on by-gone worthies. Nevertheless, a judicious admixture of humor in history books now and then does have the effect of an oasis in the desert and draws us in the way of affection towards the author indulging in it. It is this, along with other excellences,

which makes Carlyle and Froude among the most stimulating, if not the most reliable, of historians.

One other quality fairly to be called literary I must mention — the sense of proportion. Irving knows how to select and to arrange his material, and this selective instinct gives to the result artistic proportion. This is one of the cardinal virtues in all good literature, in poem, story, drama, biography, history. It is commonly said that it is as important to know what to leave out as what to put in. To tell all we know in literature is as foolish as it is in life. That is just the difference between art and raw facts as presented to the artist; from a mass of material he must choose, sift, arrange, and "compose" his picture, in the painter's term. It might seem that in history, which deals primarily with facts, with things that happened, there is not this same need of selection and suppression. But there is, because events are of very unequal importance; and to spread out everything, without light and shade or any indication of relative values, is uninspired, not to say asinine.

In a most discerning paper on the presentation of truth in history, Prof. Woodrow Wilson remarks that "the facts do not of themselves constitute the truth. The truth is abstract, not concrete. It is the just idea, the right revelation of what things mean. It is evoked only by such arrangements and orderings of facts as suggest interpretations."

Here is a test of the good historian ; and I think we may claim for Irving that, being, as I said in the beginning, a literary man preëminently, an artist above all else, he so disposes his subject-matter as to make an harmonious picture, duly proportioned and right in its perspective. Things that belong in footnotes he puts in footnotes, and he does not load you down with unnecessary details. I may add (confidentially) that some books which you find heavy, slow reading, and get discouraged over, are not heavy because they are learned (learning is right and necessary to them), but just because they are stupid in this particular, the writer unimaginatively pouring out upon you an undigested mass of items and particulars which, unless bound into a symmetrical bundle and lightened

by the throwing away of useless *impedimenta*, would break the back of an Atlas. Professor Wilson, in the same essay, more than hints that this paralysis of the sense of proportion is a characteristic of the modern school of historians. There is no gift more necessary to the historian than this of selection, of proportion. Nobody is likely to dispute the statement that Irving had it.

The books, then, which one would naturally read in order to appreciate Irving's service to American history, and in which these traits are to be found, are, first of all, those dealing with what is called Knickerbocker history, the story of the Dutch occupation of New York and sundry essays and legends in *The Sketch Book*, *Tales of a Traveller*, and *Bracebridge Hall*, treating phases of this life. Then, having got inoculated with the author, it would be well to take the Columbus biography, following it with that of Washington. Next, leaving the subject-matter having to do in one way or the other with our own country, rich pleasure and stimulation will be got out of the Spanish group : *The Alhambra*, which will be found an Arabian Nights

entertainment, the *Conquest of Granada*, and *Legends of the Conquest of Spain*. And of several biographies still unindicated, nobody will ever regret reading the delightfully sympathetic, happy life of Goldsmith, a writer between whom and Irving there are some marks of resemblance. But if one never gets any further, one should absorb the Knickerbocker books, thus getting a clear notion of the unique thing their maker did in creating them.

Glancing now at the points made, we may claim for Washington Irving, in sundry not unimportant matters, qualifications of value to the writer in general, and to historians in particular: a pleasing form, the story-telling power, historic imagination, humor, and the sense of proportion. He brought these literary gifts to the study and writing of history, and furnished an object-lesson in their use. Yet when the claim has been made without fear of contradiction, we must concede at once and frankly that our author, judged purely as historian, is not in the same class as others whose names suggest preëminently the writing of formal histories. His service to American history, as I have tried to indicate, was

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nct and large; yet, to return to the note of the theme, Irving was not primarily the writer of history, but the man of letters: he chose historical subjects not so much because he felt the desire to portray man's historic unfolding as because he felt that here was picturesque material and material affording opportunity for serious, sustained work where hitherto, in sketch and mock-history, he had been at play rather than at work. But by the judgment of posterity, those light things he did have risen to the surface and continue to float; they represent that by which he will longest be known and loved. Hence his place in our literature is as secure as that of any writer; and especial honors are his because he was a pioneer. Hence, too, his contribution to history was indirect, secondary to his contribution to belles lettres. The very fact that his leading qualities are sentiment and humor (as his best critics decide) would make this inevitable; for sentiment and humor, though valuable, are not the first requisites of the history writer. But these considerations need not belittle Irving's right to be studied and lauded in a review of the Ameri-

can historians. If not one of the great, he is one of the most winning and suggestive, figures in the group ; an artist, where art is often lacking ; a genial lover of his kind, where cold impersonality is a danger ; a weaver of romance and the magic of the imagination over the early days and doings of his own people, who have been not seldom depicted in the rawness and harsh realities of their actual conditions. Would that all historians had, like him, illustrated in their works the use and value of the literary touch and the creative mind.

**A Battle Laureate: Henry Howard
Brownell**



A BATTLE LAUREATE : HENRY HOWARD BROWNELL



I

HEINE has said in his beautiful way that the lyric poet, like the nightingale, never grows old, but sings as surely as the spring returns. In a sense this is true, yet it is also true that the note of poetry, whether lyric or other, is heard with peculiar sympathy at the occasion of its birth, and sounds less sweet with the passing of the years, the incoming of other interests and fashions. While great literature knows no time nor country, each age needs and gets its representative songs and stories, the new crowding out the old. "The experience of each new age," says Emerson, "requires a new confession, and the world seems always waiting for its poet." Especially is this so when the song is inspired by some event like our Civil War. That great conflict begot some notable

American literature, though less than so gigantic a cataclysm, so legitimate and home-made a *motif*, so high-principled a cause, might be expected to bring forth. Yet what was born of it falls to-day on less responsive ears. Only the very greatest poetry is independent of time-values and of local justification.

Hence it happens that the verse of a Connecticut singer, Henry Howard Brownell, not yet a quarter century dead, is seldom heard upon the mouths of men, albeit more genuine song in its kind was not written in the red years of 1861-65, nor perhaps did any thrill the popular heart more electrically at the moment. His slender volume of *War Lyrics* in its faded cover, taken down from the dim shelf where it is gathering that dust which alike for books and men chokes their most resounding deeds, greets the eye half reproachfully, as if in comment on the changeful humors of the world. Yet is this he whom Dr. Holmes called "our battle laureate," and who at this later day, and judged by his contribution to art, surely deserves a place among the native poets who hymned the shame, the pathos,

the terror and the glory of the Great Conflict.

Brownell was born in Providence, R.I., but moved at such an early age to East Hartford, the village lying on the eastern shore of the Connecticut opposite Hartford, that he may be claimed fairly by the State which takes its name from that beautiful and storied New England stream. Hartford folk are wont to regard him as their own, like New Yorkers in the case of George William Curtis, though he, too, first saw the light in Providence. Brownell's stock was of the best New England can show. His father was a most respected physician, his mother a De Wolfe of Rhode Island, a woman of culture and breeding, while the name of his uncle, Bishop Brownell, is honorably associated with Trinity College, the poet's *Alma Mater*. After being graduated, he taught school for a year in Mobile, Ala., and then returned to Hartford and engaged in the study of law. But he belonged to that goodly company of men who, having the instinct for letters, are really unfaithful to the Green Bag—it was a profession which he never followed with

much steadiness or zest. Delicate of health, possessed of means enough to make him independent of the *res angusta domi*, his life became chiefly one of quiet study and leisurely travel. The verse he wrote prior to the war is a reflex of such tastes and environment. But with the firing on Fort Sumter came an electric change in his life and hence in his song. The poem *General Orders*, a rhymed version of Farragut's orders to the fleet, drew the Admiral's attention, and put him in correspondence with the writer. Mr. Brownell confessing he should like to witness a sea engagement, Farragut appointed him acting ensign on his own ship, the *Hartford*, and made him his private secretary. The bard of battle was thus placed in an exceptional position for the truthful limning of what he beheld. Here was a "sea change" indeed! — from the scholarly, almost recluse life in the suburban hamlet to the awful scenic tragedy of naval warfare.

He was in several of the notable later encounters which made Farragut's a name to conjure with — among others, that Bay Fight which evoked one of his most

ringing and unforgettable fulminations. Half a score of his finest things were written on and dated from the *Hartford*, giving one a sharp sense of their reality and urgency. Here was no student's echo of the strife, but the clash and flash of war itself, writ red in blood and booming with big guns and the cry of victor or vanquished ; while as a setting to the stern picture, nay, interfused with the human action, is the swash and swell of the mighty and many-mooded ocean, her whims respondent to the alternate calm and plangent stress of civil strife.

Beholding Brownell at this juncture, one thinks of Béranger, now in prison, now on the Paris streets hobnobbing with the republican leaders, while his fiery songs stir up the insurgent mob ; or of Körner pouring out "*Vater, Ich rufe dich*" and those other lyrics which are watchwords to the German heart, as he died upon a battle-field of the War of Liberation. The song work of such men offers startling, beautiful witness to the close comradeship of life and literature. As Dr. Holmes has it, the poems so written "are to drawing-room battle poems as the torn flags of

our victorious fleets to the stately ensigns that dressed those fleets while in harbor."

After the peace was won, the war-knit friendship between the Admiral and Brownell led to the latter's being recommissioned, and as a member of the staff accompanying the great naval officer on his European trip. He met in this way the dignitaries of the earth, and had experiences which, with some men, would have found artistic expression in poetry or other literary form. Not so with this singer. His was the uncompromising love of liberty, the shy New England aloofness, and he carried his convictions with him, refusing on one occasion, it is said, an introduction to Louis Napoleon and the Sultan of Turkey. His chief inspiration, the real cause for singing, was over; and on his return to his native shores, he was for the few remaining years mostly silent — one or two poems of occasion, notably that at the reunion of Army and Navy at Newport in 1871, when he eulogized Farragut in commemorative verse, being the exception. His life thereafter was one of dignified, scholarly retirement; he was a much-respected, unob-

trusive figure, *persona grata* in Hartford's social circles whensoever he saw fit to cross the river and mingle among his friends and kinsmen. A confirmed bachelor, he resided with his mother at the family home. In 1871 cancer of the cheek developed, and after more than a year of intense suffering, borne as befitted one whose coolness under fire had been commented upon by his fellows aboard the *Hartford*, the final release came, and in his fifty-third year Henry Howard Brownell had fought his last fight. He lies in the East Hartford cemetery, and has the Connecticut in sight, in times of freshet almost within hearing. The Admiral could not be at his funeral, having preceded him; but Mrs. Farragut and her son were there, and their flowers sweetened the place and ceremony. The Brownell homestead, by one of those unpicturesque lapses of fate, is at present the hotel of the village.

Among the portraits of worthies which adorn the walls of the editorial rooms of the *Hartford Courant* is a half-length of Brownell in uniform, an excellent likeness, and one seldom seen. It presents the poet in middle age — a refined, strong,

grave face, bearded to the lips, with fine brow and a head whose thinning hair brings out the clearer the marked development in the region of the perceptive faculties. Brownell was of middle stature and spare habit, well built and of a dignified, graceful carriage; the whole personal impression of him was, by all accounts, one of quiet power, of courteous, self-respecting manhood. Unconventional, even careless in his dress, shunning public occasions, he was not a showy man, but was of the sort who stand well the test of close acquaintance.

In spite of his retired and simple life after the war, I find myself thinking of him first of all as a naval officer, a chanter of battles. In the picture gallery of the Wadsworth Athenæum at Hartford there hangs a large and spirited canvas by William H. Overend, the English artist, depicting the engagement at Mobile between the *Hartford* and the *Tennessee*. On the hurricane deck are grouped the officers of the former ship, all of them good portraits. Farragut, an heroic figure, is in the rigging hard by, and near him stands Brownell, leaning eagerly for-

ward as he watches the fight, and fully exposed to the storm of shot and shell, holding in one hand a piece of paper—perhaps the notes for *The Bay Fight*, some stanzas of which were actually written on the spot. It is in such a setting that this man is fitliest remembered.

II

Brownell's verse in the main originated as "newspaper poetry"—a fact suggesting the remark that not a little American literature has had a like democratic birth. In the columns of the *Hartford Courant* and other Connecticut sheets appeared some of his most brilliant work. It was gathered into books, too; for Brownell published in all four volumes of verse in the course of the twenty years between 1847 and 1866; but his distinctive work, that upon which his fame must rest, is to be found in the *War Lyrics*, which appeared one year after the close of the Rebellion. This contains the best of his earlier verse and that inspired directly by the events of the war—the lyrics and ode-like narratives written hot from the heart, *currente calamo*, amidst the

scenes they picture. Their very lack of polish, their artistic imperfections, testify not more to this genesis than does their potency of inspiration. The previous volumes, while denoting the culture of their maker, his graceful gift of rhyme and measure and his literary tastes, cannot be called markedly individual. Had Brownell done no more he would have furnished some pleasant enough reading for a day less critical than our own, but made small claim upon one who seeks to estimate American poetry of permanent interest. One feels in his antebellum song the influence of Bryant and Poe, of Whittier and Longfellow, and finds little else; his writing is imitative in manner and slight in substance. But in the *War Lyrics* (a few pieces from which were to be found in the *Lyrics of a Day*, dating two years before) are some twenty poems which may be characterized as *carmina bellorum*, veritable children of the war, presenting this singer's authentic contribution to his art and to his country. The balance of this final book, although containing several striking and artistic things, can be overlooked in the far greater sig-

nificance and worth of the work born of a deeper impulse. The characteristics that mark the finest of it—such poems as *The Bay Fight*, *Annus Memorabilis, Down*, and *The Battle Summers*—are vivid descriptions, a felicitous diction often rising to genuine beauty, even grandeur, and the born balladist's breathless rush of incident.

In fact, to call Brownell a lyric poet without qualification is misleading. He was above all else a writer of ballads, who believed in his theme, had a story to tell, and sang because emotionally vibrant. The ethical quality is strong, and the poetry is frankly, bitterly partisan: he saw no good in the foe, and such epithets as "the black flag" and "traitor sword" are hurled like hammers of Thor at his devoted head. Yet he has a true soldier's sense of bravery even in an evil cause.

"The sheen of its ill renown,
All tarnished with guilt and shame,
No poet indeed may crown,
No lay may laurel a name,"

he sings, but adds :

“ Yet never for thee, fair song,
The fallen brave to condemn ;
They died for a mighty wrong,
But their Demon died with them.”

One hardly looks for the judicial tone, eminently proper to the historian now, in a man making poems on the flag-ship before the blood of the beloved has been washed from the decks. Brownell's bias (to give it the word cool analysis suggests to-day) helped rather than harmed the quality of his verse. Poetry is of the heart, not the head, and the singer, like the reformer, must see but the side he champions and hymns.

There is in Brownell's work, again, a keen sense of the rough-and-ready *camaraderie* of the bivouac and the forecastle, showing at times in a grim humor, but oftener (since he was so dead in earnest) in the realistic, homely phrase, the strong Saxon speech of him, the unconventional rhymes and irregular stanzas, the drastic touches which a nicer, more self-conscious muse had not allowed herself. Here Brownell becomes unliterary in that he is direct, careless, and natural, not reflective. This is not to gainsay that his poetry

would have gained by condensation. It is diffuse not seldom, just as Whittier's is ; the critic can put finger on stanzas much below the poet's standard, and occasionally quite unworthy of him. Yet it may be that the impression of vital reality would have suffered had excision and trimming taken place.

There are near to ninety stanzas in *The Bay Fight*, and the idea of unity and force would have been better conserved doubtless were the song-story briefer ; as in the physical world, heat and light must have followed compression. On the other hand, in reading that production, the thought is so organically related, and the feeling so cumulatively strong and uninterrupted, that it is puzzling to say just where pruning were well.

We may look in detail at *The Bay Fight* as one of the poet's representative longer pieces ; it opens the volume, and is deemed his most popular poem. Its theme is Farragut's attack on the forts at Mobile Harbor on Aug. 5, 1864. The first stanza is a fine one :

“ Three days through sapphire seas we sailed ;
The steady Trade blew strong and free,
The Northern Light his banners paled,
The Ocean Stream our channels wet.
We rounded low Canaveral's lee
And passed the isles of emerald set
In Blue Bahama's turquoise sea ”

— the dominant *s* alliteration furnishing just the right tone-color for the scene. Then follow ten stanzas in simpler four-line ballad measure, telling with much picturesqueness of phrase and heightening of interest of the suspense before the hidden batteries opened on the ships. But the moment came :

“ A weary time — but to the strong
The day at last, as ever, came ;
And the volcano, laid so long,
Leaped forth in thunder and in flame. ”

Then with startling suddenness, to mark the change in situation, language, metre, everything is transformed :

“ ‘ Man your starboard battery,’
Kimberly shouted.
The ship, with hearts of oak,
Was going, mid roar and smoke,
On to victory!
None of us doubted,
No, not our dying —
Farragut's flag was flying ! ”

And for many strophes the whole expression and movement is terse, rapid, intense, the lilt being so cunningly made up of mingled trochees and dactyls as to convey an idea of the rush and drama of the action. The poet apostrophizes the ships as personalities; you feel he loves them as live things a-quiver with the conflict:

“Sixty flags and three
As we floated up the bay;
Every peak and mast-head flew
The brave Red, White, and Blue:
We were eighteen ships that day.”

As he hears the shock of the rebel guns, the lust of fight gets into his blood, and this stirring stanza is thrown off by way of retaliation:

“Ah, how poor the prate
Of statute and state
We once held with these fellows.
Here on the flood’s pale green
Hark how he bellows,
Each bluff old sea-Lawyer!
Talk to them, Dahlgren,
Parrot, and Sawyer!”

Down went Craven and his ships in the drawing of a breath.

“Then, in that deadly track,
A little the ships held back,
Closing up their stations.
There are minutes that fix the fate
Of battles and of nations
(Christening the generations),
When valor were all too late
If a moment's doubt were harbored.
From the main-top bold and brief
Came the word of our grand old Chief,
'Go on!' — 'twas all he said.
Our helm was put to starboard,
And the *Hariford* passed ahead.”

Through a hell of fire they pushed on;
but the enemy's shell made havoc.

“But, ah, the pluck of the crew !
Had you stood on that deck of ours,
You had seen what men may do.”

Even the regiments on shore forgot to
fire as they looked on at the awful spec-
tacle. Describing the carnage, he gives an
example of his grim realism :

“Dreadful gobbet and shred
That a minute ago were men ”

— which recalls to me a terrible touch of
Kipling's in *The Light that Failed*, where
the slain on that Soudan battle-field are

pictured, and the narrator says he had never "seen men in bulk gone back to their beginnings before." But bravery matched destruction.

"And ever, with steady con,
The ships forged slowly by,
And ever the crew fought on,
And their cheers rang loud and high.

"Grand was the sight to see
How by their guns they stood,
Right in front of our dead,
Fighting square abreast, —
Each brawny arm and chest
All spotted with black and red
Chrism of fire and blood !

"Fear ? A forgotten form !
Death ? A dream of the eyes !
We were atoms in God's great storm
That roared through the angry skies."

And now the enemy turned and fled,
and then —

"So up the Bay we ran,
The flag to port and ahead ;
And a pitying rain began
To wash the lips of our dead "

— this last image as impressive as anything
in *The Ancient Mariner*.

But now, again, the deadly ram steamed up the harbor, and the day is yet to win. Farragut gave orders to run him down.

“We stood on the deck together,
Men that had looked on death
In battle and stormy weather,
Yet a little we held our breath,
When, with the hush of death,
The great ships drew together”

— a superlatively splendid strophe, stating with all the force of indirection the fearsomeness of the collision. Then with impetuous verve we hear of the mistake whereby the Union vessels, the *Hartford* and *Lackawanna*, collided, and —

“The old ship is gone — ah, no,
But cut to the water’s edge.”

Gradually, however, the ram is ringed in by the northern fleet and plied with shot and shell, until —

“Down went the traitor Blue,
And up went the captive White,”

and these noble, pathetic lines follow :

“Up went the White! Ah, then
The hurrahs that once and again
Rang from three thousand men
All flushed and savage with fight !
Our dead lay cold and stark,
But our dying, down in the dark,
Answered as best they might,
Lifting their poor lost arms,
And cheering for God and Right.”

But the poet consoles his grief over the slain by a consideration of what the victory means :

“One daring leap in the dark,
Three mortal hours at the most, —
And hell lies stiff and stark
On a hundred leagues of coast.”

Then come some beautiful stanzas, a dirge for the dead Craven, reminiscent of Tennyson a little in spirit and rhythm ; and the poem closes in a quieter lyric vein prophetic of the time of peace after the necessary strife, and surcharged with personal devotion to the cause :

“To-day the Dahlgren and the drum
Are dread Apostles of his Name ;
His Kingdom here can only come
By chrism of blood and flame.

“Be strong: already slants the gold
Athwart these wild and stormy skies;
From out this blackened waste, behold,
What happy homes shall rise!

.
“Nor shalt thou want one willing breath,
Though, ever smiling round the brave,
The blue sea bear us on to death,
The green were one wide grave.”

It is quite impossible to read this production without a quickened pulse; it is one of the most honest and inevitable utterances ever put into ballad form or ode-like measures. It is a picture, an action, and the experience of a soul, all in one; and almost all of it is poetry of a rare, difficult, and inspirational kind.

Taking it for all in all,—sustained power, freedom yet artistic beauty of form, glow of feeling, imaginative uplift and frequent inspiration of word, phrase, and passage,—*The Bay Fight* is Brownell's most representative and memorable piece of work, an epic performance.

But he did much else in different keys, though all rounding out the one Song of the Flag. There is *Annus Memorabilis*, brief clarion call to arms, when Congress

in 1860-61 hesitated to take the step, and the poet declares :

“ 'Tis coming, with the boom of Khamsin or
Simoom,”

and with figures and in a spirit of Miltonic austerity and grandeur foretold the downfall of the “Serpent and his Crew.” This is a lyric which, when Senator Hawley read it in his Hartford editorial office, brought him to his feet in a trice, all afire with its power and passion, — Brownell as a poet being to him at the time an unknown quantity. There too is *The Battle Summers* (dated 1863), a perfect lyric, pensively reflective, quiet, noble in its musing upon the past and future, a dream

“Of many a waning battle day
O'er many a field of loss or fame;
How Shiloh's eve to ashes turned,
And how Manassas' sunset burned
Incarnadine of blood and flame.”

In the same vein, a lovely example of his more introspective mood, *A War Study* is short enough to give in its entirety :

- “Methinks all idly and too well
We love this nature — little care
(Whate’er her children brave and bear)
Were hers, though any grief befell.
- “With gayer sunshine still she seeks
To gild our trouble, so ’twould seem ;
Through all this long tremendous dream
A tear hath never wet her cheeks.
- “And such a scene I call to mind :
The third day’s thunder (fort and fleet
And the great guns beneath our feet)
Was dying, and a warm gulf wind
- “Made monotone mid stays and shrouds,
O’er books and men in quiet chat
With the Great Admiral I sat,
Watching the lovely cannon-clouds.
- “For still, from mortar and from gun
Or short-fused shell that burst aloft,
Outsprung a rose-wreath, bright and soft,
Tinged with the redly setting sun.
- “And I their beauty praised, but he,
The grand old Senior, strong and mild,
Of head a sage, in heart a child,
Sighed for the wreck that still must be.”

Down is a thrilling, lurid thing, and *Suspiria Ensis* is virile, fairly leonine in some of its strophes. *Sumter* is again a

trumpet blast, with all the *elan* of a cavalry charge in it :

“ Sight o’er the trunnion,
Send home the rammer,
Linstock and hammer !
Speak for the Union
Tones that won’t stammer !

“ Men of Columbia,
Leal hearts from Annan,
Brave lads of Shannon !
We are all one to-day —
On with the cannon ! ”

For personal characterization, the long poem, *Abraham Lincoln*, which appeared originally in the *Atlantic*, and which in some of its lines and its felicity of limning the “ first American ” is of the same stock as Lowell’s peerless ode, once read will not be forgotten. Length for length, it is fittest mate to *The Bay Fight*. My illustrative quotations may be brought to a close with a few borrowings from it and a brief comment upon its contents. It begins with a description of the peace and beauty of Nature, who, after her manner, has covered up and smoothed over the unsightly signs of war :

"The roar and ravage were vain ;
And Nature, that never yields,
Is busy with sun and rain
At her old sweet work again
On the lonely battle-fields.

"How the tall white daisies grow
Where the grim artillery rolled !
Was it only a moon ago ?
It seems a century old."

But the sad human minor strain creeps
in :

"And the bee hums in the clover,
As the pleasant June comes on ;
Ay, the wars are all over —
But our good Father is gone.

* * * * *

"There was thunder of mine and gun,
Cheering by mast and tent,
When, his dread work all done
And his high fame full-won,
Died the Good President."

Then comes a succession of burning stanzas in which the inexplicable dastard deed and the doer are scored without mercy ; and then follows one of the finest selections in the whole hundred and odd strophes — that in which Lincoln is characterized :

“ Kindly Spirit ! Ah, when did treason
Bid such a generous nature cease,
Mild by temper and strong by reason,
But ever leaning to love and peace ?

.
“ How much he cared for the State,
How little for praise or pelf !
A man too simply great
To scheme for his proper self.

“ But in mirth that strong head rested
From its strife with the false and violent —
A jester ! So Henry jested ;
So jested William the Silent.”

But he is well mourned, says the poet ;
since the world began, he declares in
noble hyperbole, none “ ever was mourned
like thee.”

“ Dost thou feel it, O noble Heart
(So grieved and so wronged below),
From the rest wherein thou art ?
Do they see it, those patient eyes ?
Is there heed in the happy skies
For tokens of world-wide woe ? ”

This land and other lands join, he goes
on, in the lamentation, and stately are the
signs and tokens thereof ; but there is
homely grief, thus pathetically set forth :

“ Nor alone the State’s Eclipse ;
But how tears in hard eyes gather,
And on rough and bearded lips
Of the regiments and the ships :
‘ Oh, our dear Father ! ’

“ And methinks of all the million
That looked on the dark dead face
’Neath its sable-plumed pavilion,
The crone of a humbler race
Is saddest of all to think on,
And the old swart lips that said,
Sobbing, ‘ Abraham Lincoln !
Oh, he is dead, he is dead ! ’ ”

The technician of verse will not fail to notice here the daring use of a feminine double rhyme, dedicate traditionally to the comic mood, in a passage of tenderest solemnity.

Next comes a fine, broadly sketched picture of a review of the home-coming soldiers :

“ And all day, mile on mile,
With cheer and waving and smile,
The war-worn legions defile
Where the nation’s noblest stand. ”

For a few stanzas the tone is exultant ; then the minor thought once more :

“ And our boys had fondly thought
To-day, in marching by,
From the ground so dearly bought
And the field so bravely fought,
To have met their Father’s eye.

“ But they may not see him in place,
Nor their ranks be seen of him ;
We look for the well-known face,
And the splendor is strangely dim.”

But after all, chants the singer, he is in
a better country, with his comrades around
him.

“ For the pleasant season found him
Guarded by faithful hands
In the fairest of summer lands ;
With his own brave staff around him,
There our President stands.

“ There they are all by his side,
The noble hearts and true
That did all men might do,
Then slept, with their swords, and died.”

Some twenty following stanzas name
and describe Lincoln’s even-Christians —
Winthrop, Porter, Jackson, John Brown,
and the rest — with him on the thither
bank of the stream. And not the leaders
alone, but the led, the nameless heroes of
the rank.

“ And lo, from a thousand fields,
From all the old battle-haunts,
A greater Army than Sherman wields,
A grander Review than Grant’s !

“ Gathered home from the grave,
Risen from sun and rain,
Rescued from wind and wave
Out of the stormy main,
The legions of our brave
Are all in their lines again !”

In the course of the succeeding stanzas
he rises to these superb lines :

“ But the old wounds are all healed,
And the dungeoned limbs are free ;
The Blue Frocks rise from the field,
The Blue Jackets out of the sea.

“ They’ve ’scaped from the torture-den,
They’ve broken the bloody sod,
They’ve all come to life again,
The third of a million men
That died for thee and for God !”

The poem ends grandly with the final
touches to this apocalyptical vision of the
spirit review :

“ The colors ripple o’erhead,
The drums roll up to the sky,
And with martial time and tread

The regiments all pass by,
The ranks of our faithful dead
Meeting their President's eye.

“ With a soldier's quiet pride
They smile o'er the perished pain,
For their anguish was not in vain —
For thee, O Father, we died !
And we did not die in vain.

“ March on your last brave mile !
Salute him, Star and Lance,
Form round him, rank and file,
And look on the kind, rough face.
But the quaint and homely smile
Has a glory and a grace
It never had known erewhile,
Never, in time and space.

“ Close round him, hearts of pride !
Press near him, side by side.
Our Father is not alone !
For the Holy Right ye died,
And Christ, the Crucified,
Waits to welcome His own.”

III

In the bead-roll of the makers of literature whom by birth or adoption the State of Connecticut may claim as her own, Henry Howard Brownell should have a sure and honored place. The list

is neither short nor insignificant: Mrs. Sigourney, Percival, and Halleck, in the earlier century, Stedman, Warner, Clemens, Bushnell, and Mrs. Stowe, in later days, are a few of the names that spring to the mind. But in all the divisions of letters naught is rarer than the true poet; and such an one is to be recognized in Brownell, recognized not only by the partial eye of local pride, but also by the colder scrutiny of critical opinion at a time when the first magnetism of the singer's theme begins to lose its magic. His was not impeccable verse; lines that limp and figures that fail are by no means absent from his writing. But he had a great subject, it took hold on him, and he was consecrate to it; his were thought, elevation, invention, imagination, and an almost unique opportunity for realism, in the right meaning of that poor, distorted word. And, withal, he was a truth-loving, high-minded, fearless gentleman. As a result, he has left a slender sheath of lyrics which so faithfully transcribe certain aspects of the Civil War, and are so vital with its atmosphere and feeling, that it is hard to see how they will miss of a lodg-

ment in the native anthology. Certainly no one else has so well performed just this service. There rings through his song that love of country which makes the Horatian quotation, "*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*," one of the hackneyed lines of Latin poetry. In his most largely conceived pieces one associates him instinctively (at least in spirit and quality) with the very few native singers — Emerson, Lowell, Whitman, Lanier — who have chanted national issues with elevation and adequate voice.

Mr. Stedman, who calls Brownell "that brave, free singer," points out with his customary keen perception the "half-likeness" of the poet to Ticknor, "sounding the war-cry of the South." They are, in sooth, kinsmen: each was born a poet; each saw his cause to be holy; and each grew impassioned and impressive with the burden of his utterance. And we, a generation later (since there is no sectionalism in genius), can love the song and the spirit of them both, burying their difference of belief under the tranquillizing years, while we drop upon their far-separated graves the memorial flowers of a united patriotism.

The Renaissance in English

THE RENAISSANCE IN ENGLISH



TO say that the English language, especially in its literary uses, has within the second half of this century experienced a veritable renaissance may seem to be making a stiff claim. Yet there is much to justify so strong a term and statement, to explain and illustrate which is the business of this paper. The original impulse has come from the specialists, who have devoted themselves to the study of Old English, to the language and literature lying back of the Norman Conquest. The past thirty years have witnessed a wide popularizing of the earlier native literary treasures through their efforts; the principal texts have been edited and translated and lectured about, and their use in schools and colleges encouraged, so that now the graduate from one of our leading and liberally endowed institutions may, if he choose, know his *Beowulf* as his father did

his Horace. These elder classics of the mother tongue have not only been taken into the curricula of instruction, but have been put forth for broader literary appreciation, with the idea of literary stimulation as well as linguistic drill. Then, too, the comparative study of the allied literatures — the output of the Germanic group of German, Dutch, and Scandinavian peoples, of which English is a kinsman — has done its share in shedding light upon our tongue as an organism governed by linguistic laws and possessing powers long unsuspected.

To this cultivation of Old English (at first the province of the few, but rapidly becoming the work and pleasure of the many) may be added the closer study and appreciation of later literary figures and epochs, — Chaucer and the Elizabethans and Spenser, to say nothing of Shakespeare himself, — together with the marked attention, reaching almost to the dignity of a cult, directed toward the historical English ballad; and last, but by no means least, the increased sensitiveness to the literary quality of the Bible. To anticipate no effect, sooner or later, upon native

modern literature, from all the exploitation of the older fields, — allowed, so many of them, to lie fallow for a long period, — is to overlook cause and effect in the developmental interrelations of speech and letters. Nothing could be further from the truth than to suppose this movement to be a matter of mere literary fashion: it goes far deeper than that. The return to Old English expression (always, of course, within limits of common sense and controlled by custom and convenience) is not a temporary fad, but will prove a permanent enrichment of the force and splendor of the speech. The preference for native words and idioms has grown so marked that it can be recognized plainly in some of our most effective and powerful writers, while signs of it crop out constantly in current literature. One who for the first time turns, for example, to the poetry of William Morris will find it something not only rich, but strange, — and for this very reason.

One of the principal things taught by this restoration of English to much of its old-time valiancy is the tongue's Germanic structure: that primitive ability in word-

forms and sentence-construction which the German, its historic cousin, has retained in larger measure. The student of English, in tracing back its line of development, becomes aware that it converges steadily toward this other tongue; so that when the Old English period is reached the investigator is astonished to see how close, compared with the present status of the two languages, is the affiliation with German, in words, forms, and idioms. So true is this that the student is told that a first requisite for any fruitful pursuance of historic English is the learning of German. But the latter, owing to its different history, has kept its native powers in relative purity; while English, subjected to more disturbing influences in the Norman Conquest and the classic Renaissance, has diverged far wider from its normal physiognomy and its original tendencies. As a result of such divergence, where the German uses a native compound like *vorwort*, the English turns to the Latin and makes *preface*; where English domesticates such a repulsive foreign importation as *massacre*, the German uses *blutbad* (blood-bath), a native formation self-explanatory to the

most illiterate of the race ; and so on with hundreds — even thousands — of other words concerning which it is to be said that had our own tongue encountered a happier linguistic experience it would, quite as readily as its sister-language, have clung to its birthright and privilege in this respect — word-forming from within, and so keeping the speech pure. And even to-day much (though not all) of this power can be reclaimed, and a realization thereof is bringing it about. Thus, it is not infrequent now that a book by a scholar bears the legend “foreword” instead of the customary “preface ;” here is plainly enough the effort to reinstate, by analogy with the German, what might have been very properly the distinctive word from the beginning. To those who have not looked into the matter such a seeming neologism may appear a bit of pedantry, an affectation with no significance ; but it is not so, for the great principle of English renascent in accordance with its organic spirit lies behind such a case. As these older words creep into the diction of the scholar aware of the historical facts we have indicated, or are used by the literary worker keenly alive

to the strength and fitness of these speech heirlooms, we may be sure that the tendency is wholesome and one to gather force in the time to come. For it is a return to the simple and the indigenous, an eschewing of the foreign, which has been overlaid like a lacquer upon the native material. Of course many of our foreign-derived words have become so thoroughly anglicized as to make it impossible, no less than unadvisable, to eradicate them. But the method proposed is not the rooting up of what is firmly planted in the speech, but a reintroduction, a calling back of the germane, thereby ousting slowly, unviolently, what is less suitable. It will be, and should be, a case of the survival of the fittest.

The movement once started by the philologists and specialists in language has been, it may be repeated, carried on with vigor by those who make literature. It is in their efforts that the popular rehabilitation of the older and purer elements of English especially may be found. And in this welcome influence poetry rather than prose will always be dominant. It is of the nature and essence of poetical diction



to be archaic, to show a large proportion of native words, and this because it is the language of the emotions, which always chooses the homespun and the familiar terms and forms natal in the speech. Words like *home*, *mother*, *father*, *love*, *heart*, and *hearth*—the category of the affections—will in all tongues be recognized as born within its body. And this contribution of poetry, the highest form of literature, to our linguistic treasure-trove will be supplemented inevitably by the most imaginative prose-writing, since the same law is there at work: the indigenous element strong when the feelings are in considerable measure implicated, the imagination widest awake. A great service is being rendered by the present acceptability of dialect literature: through the attention in fiction to the local “speech-islands,” as philologists dub them, the dialectical variations of the common stock of language are brought into notice, and a multitude of words, idioms, and phrases reinstated in the parlance, or at least in the cognizance, of the more sophisticated centres of speech. And since the linguistic survivals of the country-side are more

often than not the local persistence of what was once the best English for cultivated and literary usage, the result is a constant enrichment of the modern word-board. The counties or colonies of Great Britain, the manifold sections of the United States, have in this way yielded up rich treasures to the skilful hands of the poets and novelists. Never has the local speech been transcribed with a like faithfulness, skill, and attraction. From this cause the tongue will in time become an instrument of wider diapason, more varied in its harmonies, and vibrant with immemorial racial tones. The reader to-day gets a new sense of its possibilities, and is taught hospitably to throw open the doors to fresh material representing local survivals of the sturdy old speech which, by the good graces of literature, then become revivals of our current language.

With this outline sketch of principles, some illustrations, drawn from the various channels of contribution, will make the contention plainer and should prove not uninteresting. Let us take a passage from Dr. Hall's metrical version of *Beowulf* as an example of the sort of English used

by a student who essays to present such a monument in a modern dress, yet preserves as much as may be its primitive tang :

“ Fast the days fled ; the float was a-water,
The craft by the cliff. Clomb to the prow then
Well-equipped warriors ; the wave-currents twisted
The sea on the sand ; soldiers then carried
On the breast of the vessel bright-shining jewels,
Handsome war-armor ; heroes out-shoved then,
Warmen the wood-ship, on its wished-for adventure.
The foamy-necked floater, fanned by the breeze,
Likest a bird, glided the waters.”

To bring such language into popular consideration is educative and may be counted upon for its influence ; the archaic words or forms can readily be picked out ; found in the vernacular, they are allowed to remain in the translation ; and it is the test of the happy translator how close he clings to the original without growing obscure or offensively odd.

Dr. Furnival, the doughty president of the English Shakespeare Society, is a scholar whose studies might be expected to affect his diction, as indeed they have. In his introduction to an edition of William Harrison's *A Description of England*, this wielder of forthright English speaks

of an "unthrift young gentleman," and his description of Harrison as a personality reads thus :

A business-like, God-fearing, truth-seeking, learned, kind-hearted, and humorous fellow, he seems to me ; a good gardener ; an antiquarian and numismatist ; a true lover of his country ; a hater of shams, lazy lubbers, and evil-doers ; a man that one likes to shake hands with across the rift of two hundred years that separates us.

The effect of this upon the reader is of a style plain, familiar, and racy ; but the more it be studied *in extenso* the clearer is it seen that its quality is due to a bias for the older words and constructions — a characteristic of Dr. Furnival's manner of writing in general.

Among modern historians none is so remarkable for the Saxon simplicity of his style as Freeman ; he carries his preference for the vernacular so far that at times he will repeat the same native word again and again within a few lines rather than use its classic or romance equivalent — with an effect of baldness and sameness in his diction. It is not surprising that this great historian's burrowing in the past of

England and English should have left its mark on his prose ; the following passage, from the first lecture in *The English People in its Three Homes*, brings the point home :

Here on your soil I am not indeed in mine own home, but I am none the less among mine own folk. I am among men of mine own blood and mine own tongue, sharers in all that a man of either England deems it his pride and happiness to share in. How can we be strangers and foreigners to one another, how can we be other than kinsfolk and brethren of the same hearth, when we think that your forefathers and mine may have sailed together from the oldest England of all in the keels of Hengest or of Cerdic—that they may have lurked together with Ælfred in the marshes of Athelney—that they may have stood side by side in the thick shield-wall on the hill of Senlac—that they may have marched together as brethren to live and die for English freedom alike on the field of overthrow at Evesham and on the field of victory at Naseby?

Here, again, I am aware, the general physiognomy of style is that of a homely, strong simplicity, having, however, an eloquence all its own ; here, it might be

said, is no revamping of the tongue, but only a straightforward manipulation of English unadorned. Yet such a style is an exceedingly rare phenomenon ; it may be stated boldly that an example of it thirty years ago cannot be found in English. Only from one who had drunk deep draughts from the purest sources of our speech could such felicitous handling of its Germanic powers have come. Mr. Freeman, in the book quoted from, bears down on our close relationship to the Germans and Dutch, respectively second and first cousins. Speaking of the "tie" which binds the English of the British isles to that ancient England of the continent whence they came, he acknowledges that it may not be at first evident, and "does not force itself upon the mind by the most obvious witness of language, of history, of all that makes divided brethren to be brethren still. But the tie is still real ; it is still living." He is thinking here of other things than language, but his words apply thereto in full force.

Other modern historians, whose style is strong on the native side, — men like Green and Froude and Harrison, — fur-

nish examples, though not in so striking a degree as Freeman, of the influence upon personal diction of delvings in the bygone life and language. A glance at some modern poets may be taken, to strengthen the impression; and no man may fitlier head the list than William Morris, whose verse, as already hinted, is notable in this matter of good old English. I draw on his great story-cycle, *The Earthly Paradise*, a stanza from *The Man born to be King*:

“ So long he rode he drew anigh
 A mill upon the river’s brim
 That seemed a goodly place to him ;
 For o’er the oily, smooth millhead
 There hung the apples growing red,
 And many an ancient apple-tree
 Within the orchard could he see,
 While the smooth millwalls white and black
 Shook to the great wheel’s measured clack
 And grumble of the gear within ;
 While o’er the roof that dulled that din
 The doves sat crooning half the day,
 And round the half-cut stack of hay
 The sparrows fluttered twittering.”

We have chosen this earlier unobtrusive example of a happy use of the native English elements in verse rather than one

from the later, more pronouncedly archaic—and to some artificially Germanic—work of Morris, though this richly illustrates the principle. This natural *trouvère* may be called a pioneer of the linguistic renaissance when it is remembered that the chief poem-group of his life dates from 1868–70. And with him may properly be set Swinburne; he too exhibits in his verse, in his diction and metres as well, the strong influence upon him of the root-flavors of speech, though in his case a softer, more voluptuous effect is gained by the intermingling of classic elements. Take these stanzas of his magnificent pæan, *The Armada*, and see how well-nigh every word of it is home-born and monosyllabic—a fact making its rhythmic flow all the more wonderful and its force the more potent :

“Greed and fraud, unabashed, unawed, may strive to
sting thee at heel in vain ;
Craft and fear and mistrust may leer and mourn and
murmur and plead and plain :
Thou art thou ; and thy sunbright brow is hers that
blasted the strength of Spain.

“Mother, mother beloved, none other could claim in
place of thee England’s place ;



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Earth bears none that beholds the sun so pure of
record, so clothed with grace ;
Dear our mother, nor son nor brother is thine as
strong or as fair of face.

“How shalt thou be abased ? or how shall fear take
hold of thy heart ? of thine,
England, maiden immortal, laden with charge of life
and with hopes divine ?
Earth shall wither, when eyes turned hither behold
not light in her darkness shine.

“England, none that is born thy son, and lives, by
grace of thy glory, free,
Lives and yearns not at heart and burns with hope to
serve as he worships thee ;
None may sing thee : the sea-wind’s wing beats down
our songs as it hails the sea.”

Mr. Stedman speaks of Morris as showing
how well “our Saxon English is adapted
for the transmission of the Homeric
spirit ;” a fair characterization also of
much of Swinburne’s lyric and dramatic
writing.

Compared with these men in their typical
manner, the poetry of the great earlier
men — Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, and
Shelley — shows a startling difference in
regard of the relative prominence of native
English words and formations. They had

not the advantage of the popularization of younger literature which has since transpired. And the latter-day bards, the generation subsequent to the Morris-Swinburne time, reveal this influence more and more, just in proportion as they are virile and awake to larger possibilities for melody and harmony now open to English.

Of American singers Sidney Lanier is unique in his sensitiveness to Old English language and literature, coloring all his work and giving it a distinctive stamp. The fine couplet —

“By so many roots as the marsh-grass sends in the
sod,
I will heartily lay me a-hold on the greatness of God ”

— is representative of his style ; and this stanza of the *Ballad of Trees and the Master* stands, in its Saxon directness, for much more :

“ Into the woods my Master went,
Clean forespent, forespent.
Into the woods my Master came,
Forespent with love and shame.
But the olives they were not blind to Him,
The little gray leaves were kind to Him ;
The thorn-tree had a mind to Him
When into the woods He came.”

Stevenson too, and Kipling, whether as poets or prosers, are of this goodly company ; the very title of the former's *Underwoods* is eloquent of these older speech memories, while in that lyric repository is the perfect *Requiem* with its now renewed pathos, each several word of which is English unadulterated, with the one exception of the word *verse* :

“REQUIEM.

“ Under the wide and starry sky,
Dig the grave and let me lie.
Glad did I live and gladly die,
And I laid me down with a will.

“ This be the verse you grave for me :
Here be lies where be longed to be ;
Home is the sailor, home from the sea,
And the hunter home from the hill.”

Kipling also, among those enchanting provocative interludes of rhyme which are to be found in his prose books, has this bit which clings to the native side of the mother-tongue in a fashion typical of this virile young maker of measures and spinner of yarns :

“Oh, was I born of womankind, and did I play
alone?
For I have dreamed of playmates twain that bit me to
the bone.
And did I break the barley bread and steep it in the
tyre?
For I have dreamed of a youngling kid new riven
from the byre,
An hour it lacks and an hour it lacks to the rising of
the moon;
But I can see the black roof-beams as plain as it were
noon.”

Nor is this bent for pure English confined to the “chiels” of the rising generation: it is symptomatic, and the open-eyed reader meets with it on all sides. In a poem by Graham R. Tomson occurs the line —

“And all her talk was of some *outland* rare”

—a direct parallelism with the German *ausland*. In Bliss Carman’s fine Stevenson threnody, *A Sea-mark*, there are half a dozen signs of this desire or instinct — which comes to the same thing — for resuscitating latent powers to the freshening and beautifying of latter-day vocabulary and construction. Thus:

"But I have *wander-biddings* now ;"

"You brethren of the *light-beart* guild,
The mystic *fellowcraft* of joy ;"

"A valiant *earthling* stark and dumb ;"

"The *journey-wonder* on his face ;"

"Heart-high, *outbound for otherwhere* ;"

—the italics indicating phrasing which shows this promising American verse-man to have learned the time's lesson in linguistics.

And prose literature, notably fiction, adds richly to the evidential material, dialect (as explained) being a main source of contribution. Again Stevenson and Kipling are in the van. In *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, the story which first drew popular attention to one who had long before revealed to the judicious an artist's hand, may be found half a dozen places which illustrate the tendency to fall back upon the ancient privileges of a tongue of which he was past-master: as where "a sharp *intake* of the breath" is spoken of. Some of the matchless descriptive writing in *The Ebb-tide* affords occasion for more or less in the same sort, as here:

There was little or no morning bank. A brightening came in the east; then a wash of some ineffable, faint, nameless hue between crimson and silver; and then coals of fire. These glimmered awhile on the sea-line and seemed to brighten and darken and spread out; and still the night and the stars reigned undisturbed. It was as though a spark should catch and glow and creep along the foot of some heavy and almost incombustible wall-hanging, and the room itself be scarce menaced. Yet a little after, and the whole east glowed with gold and scarlet, *and the hollow of heaven was filled with the daylight.*

Here there is the magic blending of native and imported elements to make a truly admirable style; but ever and anon (as in the italicized closing words) Stevenson places before the ravished observer a compound or turn of expression or sentence which has a relish of old time and the sanction of bygone generations.

Kipling, too, is cunning in the same fashion, allowing, of course, for the personal equation. Take the following from *A Matter of Fact*, one of his most grow-somely imaginative tales:

As he spoke, the fog was blown into shreds,

and we saw the sea, gray with mud, rolling on every side of us and empty of all life. Then in one spot it bubbled and became like the pot of ointment that the Bible speaks of. From that wide-ringed trouble a Thing came up — a gray and red Thing with a neck — a Thing that belled and writhed in pain.

The illustrations from current fiction-makers who have turned dialect to literary uses is legion, and an embarrassment of riches the result; examples are hardly necessary, so obvious is this aspect of the movement. In Raymond's delightful Somersetshire idyl, *Tryphena in Love*, we find, "And *to-year* she was meeting with wonderful good luck" — the remark being the author's own, not a part of the dialogue. *To-year* survives in dialectical service (like countless other words), and is common enough in the Elizabethan dramatists and further back; it may be seen that, by analogy with *to-day* and *to-morrow*, it is a capital formation, a regrettable loss to modern English. Mr. Raymond, in the preface to his volume of short stories, *Love and Quiet Life*, speaks of this locution, and adds: "And what is the distinguishing initial vowel of the past-partic-

iple of the rustic but a heritage from our Saxon [he means Old English] ancestors?" — going on to point out the resemblance between the countryman's prefix, *a*, in *a-want*, and the German *ge* in *gewandt*. Ever and again the German comparison forces itself on the student. In Justin H. McCarthy's pleasing novel, *A Woman of Impulse* (which may be read as the antidote to *Dodo*), I find him speaking of "a ballad with the *overword*" — also a strictly Germanic compound.

It is hardly necessary to illustrate from the Scotch word-work of Barrie, Crockett, and their commensals, since, of all the dialect loosely grouped under the convenient name "Scotch," it may be declared that it is strongly conservative northern English; that is a fair description, historically, of the variations in English to the north of the Firth. Scotch proper, it may be added, is Celtic — quite another thing. But the more conventional speech of these two writers, as well as of others like Quiller Couch and Hardy and Blackmore, furnishes food for our thesis. Here, for example, are the very opening sentences of Barrie's *A Window in Thrums* :

On the bump of green round which the brae twists, at the top of the brae and within cry of T'nowhead Farm, still stands a one-story house, whose whitewashed walls, streaked with the discoloration that rain leaves, look yellow when the snow comes. In the old days the stiff ascent left Thrums behind, and where is now the making of a suburb was only a poor row of dwellings and a manse, with Hendry's cot to watch the brae.

Quiet, unforced English, this ; but when you come to compare it with that of an immediate earlier generation, it is not hard to notice the change. Or read this from Nora Hopper's strangely poetic *Ballads in Prose*, where the influence is Celtic of the Irish order, and the stylistic model Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* :

And when next Cuchullin woke from his dreams he found that Ineen still held him fast, though she was dead and cold ; and with some difficulty he loosed her hands from him, and dug with his sword a grave for her in the sand, and there he laid her sorrowfully, praying Angus, the Master of Love, to keep her soul in his Golden House, and Manannan MacLir to hold his waves aloof from her sleeping-place. And when he visited the place with Eimer, after a year

and a day, they found that the sea had fallen back for half a league, and that the place where the sea-girl slept was a broad space of grass, and in the midst of the grass rose white spikes of meadow-sweet, the flower which for the sake of a forgotten love and a forgotten sacrifice is called of us to-day Crios Chuchulainn (Cuchullin's Belt).

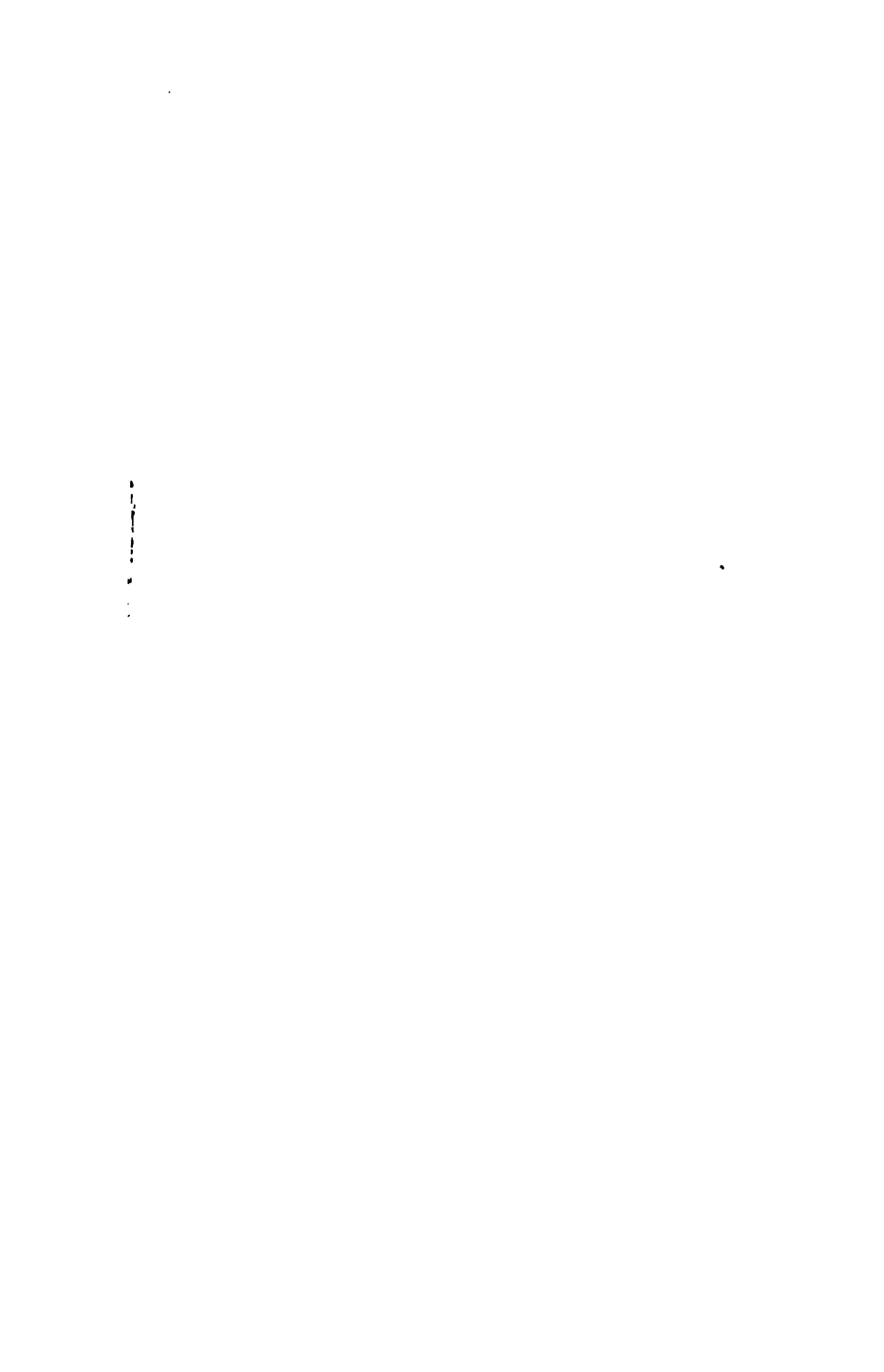
That in the movement here-above sketched certain influences have been long at work has been conceded frankly, and those influences named. Nevertheless, that a strong added impulsion has come from the popularization of Old English language and literature, signs of which are easy to be seen, is a plain matter to the student and lover of his native speech. Sometimes it shows in the literary regeneration of a word which for centuries has lain *perdu*; sometimes through the introduction of an idiom out of strict analogy with the German; again by the elevation of dialect to a more urbane place in the tongue; most often by a widespread tendency toward monosyllabic Anglo-Saxon. But, whatever the manifestations, all hark back to a common cause, stand for one phenomenon; and it may be affirmed of the younger writers, whether using the

grand old mother-tongue in America, in England, or in any one of the great colonies where she is at home, those we are coming to look upon as torch-bearers are the best exemplars of this hopeful characteristic, it being, in sooth, one reason of their strength and place in the forefront. A point to be borne down upon is the difference between this movement and sundry fashions in the language of literature and life which have their little day from time to time in various countries. Such was the Elizabethan Euphuism, the Spanish Gongorism, the Marianism of Italy, the *Schwulstigkeit* of the Germans, the Parisian preciosity ridiculed by Molière. A common hall-mark of all these is affectation ; they have a narrow aloofness, are superficial and temporary, averse from what is genuinely natural and national, whereas the return to the older in English is — allowing for the occasional posing and strained effects of those whose province it is to bring discredit on any tendency good in itself — a going back to what is simple, strong, direct, and vital to our speech instincts.

This renaissance of English, then, silent

but steady, for the most part unsensational, but none the less potent, is to be apperceived to-day, and in the twentieth century will be more apparent. And the very fact that our leading writers wish thus to turn back to native uses and things is, so far as it goes, proof of the race's health, of its solidarity and *esprit de corps*. We may take comfort in it when confronting an alarmist like Nordau, for a general degeneration of the speech would follow any general degeneration of literature; and the testimony of language, just now, directs us to opposite and more cheerful conclusions.

American English



AMERICAN ENGLISH



THE thorough study of English, as language and as literature, which, during the last generation, has been prosecuted with zeal in several countries, has blown away the mists in various directions and let in the sunlight of truth upon many questions historical, philological, and æsthetic. One result of the work done has been to put us in a position to estimate at their true value ignorant or shallow criticisms on the particular form of English spoken in this country — British strictures often, but sometimes emanating from native writers who aped the former, and lacked all sound knowledge of the subject. Thanks to the fact that both the language and literature of our race are now known in their genesis and their historic development, the matter of the relation and comparative importance of the various forms of the English mother-tongue,

spoken in the different countries where that speech is at home, can be pronounced upon to-day with intelligence and a good degree of certitude. And it is high time some general canons of criticism should be made popular; for a woful amount of misconception and nebulous thinking is to be noted among people of brains and culture. In truth, questions of language-use in general appear to offer a premium for guesswork and opinion without any logic back of it. One man is as good as another when it comes to philology, is too often the assumption in society. The two commonest methods of settling disputes when the matter of words comes up is by an appeal to a dictionary — and more likely than not to one which should not be taken as a final authority — or, worse yet, by the complacent remark that So-and-So is right in London; *ergo*, it is right for the United States of America. There are, however, a few principles which can be and ought to be set up as a guide to save us from the thoughtlessness or the ignorance implied in such attempts to get at the truth. Sounder views, to be sure, are not unique: Mr. Brander Matthews,

for example, in his belligerently patriotic paper on *Americanisms and Briticisms*, sets forth with a lively wit the fact that honors are easy in the matter of good speech here and over seas, and so introduces the idea of independence to the self-respecting native. But Mr. Matthews makes no effort to formulate the principles underlying his position, and based on literary and linguistic history; hence his paper, stimulating and healthy in tone as it is, can hardly be named as a court of appeal. In the present essay a method of criticism is suggested and a few tests applied which, it is hoped, may prove helpful to others who are interested in the subject, but not sure of their footing.

In the past the typical British attitude toward American English has been that of patronizing superiority and shallow incompetence; nor is this state of things superseded altogether at the present time. Plenty of Englishmen when they hear our familiar use of the word *guess* smile at it as a Yankee barbarism, blissfully unconscious that it is in the highest literary usage of the fourteenth century and commonly employed by both Wiclif and

Chaucer. Thus, in the former's translation of the New Testament, Matthew vi., 7, we read: "But in praying, nyle ye speke much, as hethen men doon, for the gessen that they be herd in their myche speche." And in the Prologue to the Canterbury Tales, line 1182 runs as follows: "A forster was he soothly, as I gesse." In the same way, we find even so great a scholar as the late E. A. Freeman, on hearing the word *rare*, as applied to underdone beef, used over here, jumping to the conclusion that this was an occidental locution, and much surprised when it was pointed out to him that Dryden has the word in this sense a couple of hundred years ago. Without further illustration, these two examples suggest an axiom which may be expressed, categorically, in this wise: The great majority of alleged Americanisms are survivals of older and excellent English which the Britons have allowed to fall into desuetude. It is very easy to be tricked in this matter, and the more study one makes of it the greater caution one is likely to exercise in deciding off-hand on a given word or idiom. A personal experience may be in order.

When the writer first ran across the plural noun *humans* in an American newspaper, he shuddered with horror. The headline *A Heap of Humans*, to describe the results of a railway accident, seemed to smack of the wild and woolly West so strongly, it had an effect of such slangy newness, that the simple act of consulting a good dictionary was scorned; and it was only after meeting the word in Kipling, and later in the Derbyshire dialect of a generation ago, as written in *David Grieve*, that the word-use was seen to be English. Thereupon a reference to the Century Dictionary disclosed *humans* as popular with the Elizabethan dramatists. Bartlett, in his *Dictionary of Americanisms*, gives the word, thus slipping into a very easy error.

Having set up, then, this first great principle, that a given Americanism in speech may be simply a retention of good English, the course of action of the seeker after truth is obvious when a dispute arises: find out if the word, phrase, idiom, be not a legitimate survival, and if it turn out to be (which it will, as stated, in a surprisingly large number of cases), why, then stick to it as defensible and quite ,

right. Whether it happen to be in London usage to-day or not matters not a whit. Moreover, it is the testimony of scholars, and of British scholars themselves, that, as a whole, American English has preserved the archaisms of the parent speech with more care and good faith than the British English itself. This is a very remarkable phenomenon at first sight, but quite capable of explanation. A band of colonists, say, comes over to these shores in the early seventeenth century, and settles, bringing the speech uses of their time and whilom habitat; inasmuch as the region these colonists live in is an unpeopled one, and they are, so to speak, a close community, their words and idioms will tend to persist, and, as a result, after a hundred years or so their speech will resemble that of their fatherland at the time they left it more nearly than will the speech of those left behind in England, who have been subjected to far more of outside and disparate influence. This is the reason why the language of the countryside is always more conservative, more flavourous of the past speech-life, than is the tongue of the town. Thus, New Englandisms

will not seldom turn out to be Old Englandisms in disguise ; that is, with a clipped nervous pronunciation or a nasal drawl.

But Americanisms in language do not have to be survivals of older English expression in order to be impeccable. They may be revivals also, and yet quite as legitimate. In the case of survivals, we have words which, in use among the English at the time the American colonists branched off from the mother-tree, were kept alive by the latter, while allowed to die by the former. By revivals, on the other hand, are meant those speech-uses once current, but allowed by English-speaking folk to be superseded by newer words, pushed into forgotten corners, yet treasured in literary monuments, and awaiting the perceptive eye and the deft hand to bring them again on the stage. These rehabilitations are the peculiar province of literature and scholarship ; and, owing to the renaissance of older English already mentioned, they are a marked feature of the present day. A moment's reflection will show that in this linguistic liberty the American has naturally as large a part and as clear a franchise as his British cousin. American

writers and speech-users, in the course of their commerce with the older English authors, may very well adopt words and phrases therefrom; who shall gainsay them? It is common property the American has drawn upon, and he has simply been more assimilative than his kinsman across the water, in case the latter has not revived the word or idiom. There are men to-day in this country who read their one hundred lines of *Beowulf* in the original as a morning eye-opener; Dr. Furness, of Philadelphia, reads a play of Shakespeare daily, it is said. With this sort of thing going on, it is not only natural, but inevitable, that the sturdy old resources of our tongue should serve as a stimulus to restore much that is fine and germane to our national instincts in speech, and which has been lying fallow, maybe, for centuries, waiting for the resurrecting hand. The tendency to fall back thus on native words and idioms which have been disesteemed in favor of Latin or romance substitutes may be seen in the poetry of William Morris, the prose of Freeman, the tales of Robert Louis Stevenson and Rudyard Kipling; or, with us, the poetry of Lanier

furnishes an example, verse, with its leaning to the archaic, always preceding prose in this respect. A single example will suffice: For generations the word *preface* has been in vogue to denote an introduction to what follows; but it is now no uncommon thing to find scholars using in its place the word *forespeech*, the pure English equivalent of the Latin *preface*. This is one of the revivals we have in mind; and, obviously, it makes no difference whatever if it chance to be an American or a Britisher, an Anglo Indian or an Australian, who revives the acceptable locution. Such a one as the above commends itself at once to every perceptive handler of the tongue. The criticism that attacks such a procedure and dubs the result an "Americanism," when it happens to originate on our soil, is wide of the mark and sufficiently amusing. One caution is, however, necessary. Before deciding that a word, phrase, or idiom is a revival in this way, rather than a survival, dictionaries, scholars, or the literature itself in all its manifold forms of dialect, slang, and technical usage, must be consulted; only by a careful, lynx-eyed survey of the field can one



indulge in that perilous pleasure, a cocksure judgment. For, over and over again, it will be found that what appears to be new-coined or revamped has in reality a steady local life somewhere within the broad lands where the English language is at home.

But supposing an Americanism is not a survival of older and legitimate uses nor a revival due to assimilation of the earlier literature, even if it be a brand-new creation, something that never was on sea or land, it will not be illegitimate or unacceptable necessarily; not at all. If it obey the laws of the genius of our tongue, it may be both without sin and acceptable. But the occasion must demand it, and the man on hand be large enough to furnish it. With these conditions fulfilled, there is no more against neologisms made on American soil than there is against those made on British soil. In either case it is a question of need, taste, and knowledge. It is safe to make the assertion that to-day, what with the survivals, the revivals so fast appearing, and the constant accessions from all sides to the ranks of our English word army, as the scientific nomenclature

is enriched by new discoveries, there is less necessity than ever before for the minting of fresh coins of expression. Yet times and occasions there are which demand the creative fiat.

Such a movement as the temperance cause gives us in this century the capital word *teetotaller*, so good a formation that it is fathered by both British and American, though the weight of evidence favors our priority of use; while reconstruction days produced the spirited word *scalawag*, unquestionably originating here, even if it be traced back to a connection with the diminutive Shetland cattle known as *scal-lowäg*. Or for an absolute creation, our socio-political life gives us *come-outer*, which immediately commends itself for native strength and fitness. And in the way of idiom, the colloquial *come off*, the serious discussion of which may still provoke a smile, will on analysis be seen to be a vigorous formation entirely on the lines of historic construction and finding its literary prototype in the Shakespearean *go to*, which once, beyond peradventure, had a connotation as jocose as has the recent idiom at present to our ears. A decade hence it

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sound very different. How silly it would be to deny to some of these American speech creations an equal right to existence with sundry British formations which also prove themselves legitimate offspring, not bastards! Something in the local conditions called for them and so they were born, and other like manner will be, whether in the little isle or in the broad free ways of the western hemisphere.

And notice of the low-born word or phrase of yesterday that you are not in a position yet to say whether it will be ephemeral or become historic. The Britisher cannot pronounce *ipse dixit* upon it, for the very good reason that we Americans cannot tell ourselves. The slang of to-day is the idiom of to-morrow: slang, indeed, being idiom in the making. It is evident now that *dude* will be read in the novels and essays of the better class by the future student who puzzles over our native speech traits; it is duly recognized by the International Webster and the Century Dictionaries. But half a dozen years ago it was still doubtful coin as a legal tender. Under these circumstances, how absurd for the British censor to pass judg-

ment on some *fin de siècle* speech-use in America on the ground that it is non-British and vulgar. What he cavils at may be classic in the next generation ; or, although he may hit upon some word or idiom that is essentially *canaille* and never can be received as part and parcel of good American usage, he is in no position to constitute himself a judge, inasmuch as inadmissible cockney slang is in evidence quite as palpably as the Bowery *argot* which offends his taste. The Londoner who calls his fellow a "bloody fool" is just as far from good English as the Yankee who playfully characterizes his mate as a "son-of-a-gun." In connection with this subject of slang, it is worth mentioning that in the power of making fit and forceful words on occasion the American, as every fair-minded student will admit, is remarkably happy. Prof. John Earle, one of the first living authorities on English, and himself an Englishman, has said that "in the utilizing of slang by giving it an artistic value, American literature seems to enjoy a peculiar prerogative." Orthoepy makes a large division of the general subject of English speech, and with American English in

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mind, a remark or two must be made about our pronunciation in relation to that of the Briton. Here again historic phonetics and the laws of linguistic development governing the evolution of the English tongue as a whole must be consulted and answer given accordingly. Owing to climatic and resultant physiological reasons, owing perhaps to the freer mingling of races on our shores, English in the mouth of Americans has a sound not always tallying with the same words spoken on the other side of the big pond. And on the whole, let it be admitted frankly that the vowel qualities heard from our cousins are richer and more musical than our own. Therefore, when the broad *a* sound is taught in the schools or at home as a substitute for the higher, thinner, intensely cacophonous vowel heard in the noun *calf* on the lips of the New England rustic, exactly the correct thing is being done; for the broad *a* not only makes for euphony, but is historically right phonetics. It does not smack of Briton worship to favor it, unless it be favored for the sole reason that it has the London hall-mark. But in some other of his orthoepic characteristics, the Briton

is slovenly and reprehensive: as where he slurs over a syllable in order to pronounce *conservatory* as if he wrote it *conserv't'ry*.

For an American to imitate him here shows a beautiful commingling of the dunce and the sycophant. The matter of accent in English is one which most people find bothersome, and are conscious of insecurity about: a fact witnessed to by the frequent appeals to those in authority and the puzzlement following on disagreement among the dictionary-makers. There is, however, one great general law of accent at work in English speech which, once in the mind, will keep the American from ever stretching out imploring hands for help from England, as if the decision must come thence to be of avail. The law is this: Accent in English is recessive, it tends to work back to the root syllable, or even further, to the first syllable, when the word happens to be foreign and the root does not coincide with the first syllable, as it does with native English words. This law of recessive accent in our tongue — in sharp contrast with a tongue like the Persian, for example, where the accent is progressive, or tends to fall on the final

wielded by the English colonists and their descendants. And since degeneration of speech can only come from degeneration of character, the inference is that the English stock is in a bad way in these parts. But the quality of the original settlers, the stuff that they showed to be in them in the troublous colonial and revolutionary days and in later days of war and peace, together with our present proud position among the nations of civilization, suffice to answer such a preposterous notion. American English is to-day a distinct variatoin of British English, and for the same reason that French, Italian, Spanish, and the other Romance tongues are variants of the mother Latin tongue. Dialectical differentiations always arise where a homogeneous language sends out branches to other parts of the earth ; and, logically, it is as absurd to fault or depreciate the speech of the United States for its divergences from British uses as it would be to take exception to the language of Leopardi, Hugo, and Valera, because it is not Ciceronian Latin. The only difference is that in the case of Romance peoples a much longer time has elapsed since they split off from

Rome, and so the changes are more striking. In the case of American English, too, the centripetal forces of modern social life will forbid ours ever becoming a distinct tongue. But room there will always be for individual freedom and national independence in this matter of speech, and that American who fears to exercise these democratic privileges is not only laying himself open to the charge of ignorance: he is forfeiting his birthright as well.

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Literature for Children



LITERATURE FOR CHILDREN



THE key-note of modern education is found in the right instruction of children. The acceptance and spread of the kindergarten idea may be said to have revolutionized our notions in respect of this problem, and from this as a central principle and efficient cause all betterment of pedagogic methods in the higher grades of school and college and university life has come. Touching these subsequent periods, the most important and significant change in the conception of the proper grading and relative value of studies is the recognition of English (in the broad sense) as a natural centre of culture for an English-speaking person. It is coming to be felt that education in the English language, literature, and life, for purposes of vital broadening and enrichment, is of pronounced importance for those who speak the tongue. As a

result, in our manifold institutions of learning the English course is given more time, more attention, and more dignity as a branch of work. All who keep abreast of modern pedagogic thought are aware of this.

And along with the changed attitude towards English goes a wiser appreciation of the use of literature in this study; a tendency to make literary instruction more dominant and to introduce it at an earlier period of the school life, postponing the purely analytic studies — of which grammar is a type—to a later time. The banner cry of those leaders who have at heart the interests of the primary and intermediate grades now seems to be: "Not facts — ideals;" a phrase the sentiment of which is revolutionary to the older notions. Psychology has taught us that the intuitive emotional impressions can be received best at a comparatively tender age; and such are the very impressions imparted by the early contact with noble literature. The plastic sensibilities are ready for the effect of poetry and imaginative prose; all that stands for the heart-side and the soul-side of literature

may to the best advantage be inculcated during that receptive hour of childhood when the good can be appreciated, though mayhap it cannot be explained. It is a splendid victory that has been won in the grasping and engrossing of this idea: instead of the three R's of the old-time educational dispensation we have substituted the three H's, — the hand, the head, and the heart, — each to be trained, all to be interrelated; the manual, mental, and emotional evoked in the organic unity which is properly theirs.

This shift and broadening of ideals is a main cause for rejoicing. The thesis, then, that the best literature is none too good for young children in the school or in the home, that to stimulate the imagination and awaken the soul through the gracious ministries of song and story and soul revelation is of more importance than the memorizing of dates or the utilities of the multiplication-table, is pretty well established. One who undertakes to argue for the making of early instruction in literature ethical and inspirational rather than analytic and knowing, has his audience with him as it never would have been

a generation ago. We now regard education not so much as an attempt to fill up a scholar with facts and figures, or to prepare him for money-getting but rather as the drawing forth of the powers in such symmetry that the moral and spiritual faculties shall be given precedence of those intellectual. Hence the emphasis put upon the efficacy of early ideals and the fruitful influence of great literature which, by the very condition of its greatness, is a power that makes for spiritual quickening.

But what are the best methods in bringing about this precious nurture of children through contact with the word-work and the soul-work of poets, orators, dramatists, and weavers of story? What literature shall be given them, and how and when?

At the outset we must contradistinguish between boys and girls. Boys like action, adventure; they run to the sensational, even truculent, in reading; girls, *per contra*, like the domestic, that which centres about the family affections and the sweet ministries of home. This is a broad generalization. Girls there may be who have a fondness for *Tom Brown's School Days*, boys



who admire *Little Women*. But the distinction holds, and it suggests at once the disadvantage of a public school where sex in literary or other education must be ignored more or less. Of course, there are to-day those who see no sex in the thought-processes and emotions of young people of opposite sexes — who indeed go further and regard mind-stuff as sexless throughout life. Such will pooh-pooh at my notion. But to the present writer the willingness to overlook or the practical inability to recognize such claims shows shallow thinking. Great laws of nature arraign themselves against puny man here.

But, waiving this point, it may be remarked that the fast-growing inclination to give children pieces of literature in the whole, instead of by scraps in the excerpts of earlier days, is an excellent good thing. A piece of literature is an organism and should therefore be put before the scholar, no matter how young, with its head on, and standing on both feet. This idea is now generally acted upon ; witness the enormous growth of text-books presenting literary masterpieces in their en-

tirety — or if this is not done, at least in substance keeping to the organic structure. Certain critics of the inner circle affect to sneer at this tendency. Andrew Lang, for example, laments what he deems the Bowdlerization and cheapening of the classics, an objection whimsical enough and hardly becoming in one who has been dubbed, facetiously, Editor-in-General to the British public. Nor must the moral aspect of the editing of literature be overlooked — this, too, provocative of cultured sneers. Mr. Howells has written true and noble words on this: "I hope the time will come," says he, "when the beast-man will be so far subdued and tamed in us that the memory of him in literature shall be left to perish; that what is lewd and ribald in the great poets shall be kept out of such editions as are meant for general reading, and that the pedant-pride which now perpetuates it as an essential part of those poets shall no longer have its way. At the end of the ends such things do defile; they do corrupt." It is well to get such testimony from a captain of letters.

In view of all this preparation of stand-

ard writings for the young, there is little excuse for putting children off with the second-best and the well-enough. The choicest is none too good. The dominant division, fiction, for instance, now includes Mrs. Molesworth, Mrs. Gatty, Mrs. Ewing, Mrs. Burnett, Mrs. Wiggin, Harris and Page, Stevenson and Kipling, and a score more, these names being set down almost at random. The pabulum furnished us children of a larger growth by Optic and Alger and Mayne Reid has been superseded by more heavenly food. And the older aristocracy of child literature still makes its appeal in books like *Robinson Crusoe* and Kingsley's *Water Babies*, to mention two that stand for many. Inasmuch as the spiritually beautiful, as we have said, is the most desirable of all, books of this sort should come first in favor — beginning with the Bible. Not the didactic, goody-goody stuff which made the old-time Sunday-school library too often a place of tears and penance for healthy-minded young folk. The day is clean gone by for the tales wherein the bad boy who goes a-fishing on the Sabbath gets not fish, but a

flogging, to be triumphed over most un-Christianly by the good little boy who didn't go — probably because he daren't. No, I mean that which is lovely, inspirational literature, where the artistic and the ethical are recognized for the kinsmen they are, linked by the subtlest, sweetest, strongest of ties. And at the very head and forefront of such-like books the Bible must be placed. The Bible, in judicious selections, not gulped down whole, is pre-eminently a book for literary and ethical stimulation. We hear much of the Bible as literature nowadays, and Professor Moulton's most suggestive volume is symptomatic, summarizing well a changed attitude, a truer philosophy. A new interest in, a deeper love towards, the Scriptures are thus born. Once concede this use of the Book, and the question of its function in the school is settled. It should have its place there, along with other great literature, as a quickener of the sense of beauty and the sense of right. To make it a theological text-book is monstrous, and if its daily presence among the pupils meant denominational teaching or propagandism we would have none of

it. But regard the Bible as a composite, a wonderful repository of history, prophecy, song, story, drama, and *naïve* people-science, matchless in expression and surcharged with the ethic temper, and its exclusion were suicidal. Better for many of us had we been made in the school, yes, and in the nursery, to commit to memory long passages and chosen parts of the Old and New Testaments — as did the young John Ruskin, it will be remembered; that great man's testimony to the potent influence upon him of the Book being worth repeating always: "Walter Scott and Pope's *Homer* were reading of my own selection, but my mother forced me, by steady daily toil, to learn long chapters of the Bible by heart; as well as to read every syllable through aloud, hard names and all, from Genesis to Apocalypse, about once a year; and to that discipline — patient, accurate, and resolute — I owe not only a knowledge of the Book which I find occasionally serviceable, but much of my general power of taking pains and the best part of my taste in literature. From Walter Scott's novels I might easily, as I grew older, have fallen to other

people's novels, and Pope might perhaps have led me to take Johnson's English, or Gibbon's, as types of language; but, once knowing the 32d of Deuteronomy, the 119th Psalm, the 15th of 1st Corinthians, the Sermon on the Mount, and most of the Apocalypse, every syllable by heart, and having always a way of thinking with myself what words meant, it was not possible for me, even in the foolishhest times of youth, to write entirely superficial or formal English." And again he declares of this experience that he counts it "very confidently the most precious and, on the whole, the one essential part of all my education."

This mention of the memorizing of Scripture by one of the masters of pure style leads on to the remark that in bringing children into contact with the great literature of the world the habit of committing to memory is most fruitful. The storing of the mind with choice passages will prove a godsend in after years — will yield good, I incline to think, even if it be done parrot-like at the time. The pedagogic tendency now is in all branches to teach independence of speech rather

than the mechanically memorized lesson. In the literature of knowledge (science) no doubt the danger lies in the latter ; but in the literature of power, which we are here considering, the memory is a trusty and valued servant who guards us from the loss of veritable treasure. How many of us in mature life can testify to the comfort and help and uplift that has come from stray fragments of poem or essay or oration learned years before, perhaps in childhood ! Often, when we are separated from books, listless, distrait, sick, they have been evangels bringing pure, sweet, and noble images and a quickened spirit.

But now, lumping boys and girls together — which, though bad psychology, seems, so far as the school goes, to be necessary — and admitting the major premise that great literature should be given them and given them early, a few more specific remarks may be made. There is considerable choice, within the category of great literature, of what is wisest to use. Divers kinds of fish come into this drag-net. I apprehend that in the intellectual and spiritual gradation

from youth to maturity the objective literature, the literature of action and character and picturesqueness, rather than that which is subjective, will be best adapted to the purpose. Hence fiction of the Walter Scott and Stevenson kind will be given preference over that of Thackeray and George Eliot. In poetry, the epic, the ballad, and the lyric of simple song will prove better than the reflective piece or the purely descriptive. History on the personal, graphic side—treating it as Carlyle conceived it to be, the story of great men—is good for the little ones and most affected by them. Dickens' *Child's History of England*, whatever its faults, has the shining merit of grasping this fact. So, of course, biography will attract more than the essay proper, for example (and still more the essay improper), that form being food for the adult digestion. I should conclude that a child who liked Charles Lamb's papers or, to mention a latter-day author, Agnes Repplier's, needed to be sent out into the open, with orders to ride a wheel or play golf or tennis. Certainly the preference would seem alarmingly priggish, though

such children exist, it may be, as do three-headed pigs and other abnormalities. Speaking broadly, it is amazing how children of the healthy, normal, matter-of-fact sort like literature that is alive, wholesome, having sentiment, not sentimentality, and some narrative human interest. As a rule, they relish it. I once experimented with a boy who hated the very word "literature," and whose soul was completely absorbed in football and track athletics. I read to him, in course, Homer's *Odyssey*, in Palmer's fine prose translation, a canto a night. The result was he imitated *Oliver Twist*, calling for more in case I flagged. And yet this was a lad of the unliterary age of fifteen, who could not abide the mere mention of poetry. But naturally enough he fell in love with the wanderings of that fine old buccaneer Ulysses; naturally enough he liked to hear about the Cyclops and the Sirens, and all the rest of it. The smell of the sea was in it all, and the smack of adventure and the magic of marvel. Be assured that the reader did not damage his case by telling the boy beforehand that here was a master poem. That had

been a stupid letting the cat out of the bag. Get the story going, and all is well: the world of children loves a story as the grown-up world is said to love a lover.

Then if we come to discriminate between prose and poetry, the former must be given the preference with young folk in mind, and the latter administered only in homœopathic doses. Here again the sexes differentiate: girls, as a class, care more for poetry than boys, as indeed do women more than men. Poetry, broadly speaking, is more subjective and elusive than prose, hence it is less adapted to the immature comprehension. Yet verse on its musical side, with its alliteration and rhyme, its rhythm and picture-making, has often a great fascination for children, as mothers many will testify; and an acquaintance with this, the highest form of literature, should be inculcated at a tender age, as likely to be of paramount service in creating ideals and developing the sense of beauty. The slow gradations by which this may be effected is a test of the nicest skill of the educator. The road from the Mother Goose jingles to the dramatic monologues of a Browning is a long, but not necessarily

a weary one. Prof. William J. Rolfe, in his recent excellent little work *The Elementary Study of English*, advocates the use of poetry in the grammar-school grade. "Let me suggest," he says, "that the critical study of some masterpiece of literature, especially poetry, is one of the best possible exercises for the teacher in this department. It may or may not be something that one has to teach in school,—it is well, in my opinion, that it should be something above the range of one's daily work,—but the manner of study is of more importance than the matter." The work will prove, he thinks, for the pupil of this age, "at once a delightful recreation and valuable self-culture."

Some principle in choosing out of the whole *corpus literaricum* the literature which can be grasped and enjoyed by the young is important, in order to avoid a false sentimentality, which too often plays about this subject. I refer to that misconception which sees the child not as it really is, but as it appears through the illusion of our mature sentiment. Perhaps the finest expression in poetry of this view is found in Wordsworth's peerless ode on the *Intima-*

tions of Immortality in Early Childhood.

That this is a superlative piece of English poetry we all know; fewer, I fear, have realized that its psychology is very dubious. If the poet had presented the child as caught up in and by his affection, transmuted into something which had all the beauty and innocence of youth with the high thought that comes with years, he had been acceptable. But to impute to the child *per se* a kind of angelhood is essentially untrue. Boys and girls do not have those shadowy intimations, nor do they come trailing garments of glory from on high. These little ones' helplessness and loveliness and trusting lack of guile constitute the most winsome appeal on earth to older folk. It is right and seemly to overflow with feeling about children. But Wordsworth goes further: he says, practically, that the child is nearer high, pure, and wondrous things than the man, which contradicts all science and common-sense. The brutal fact is that your normal child, sound of mind and limb, is, in comparison with what he may hopefully come to be, a healthy little animal; more selfish in a *naïve* way; more absorbed in

practical and carnal matters, and not a bit interested in supernal affairs. Our child literature, therefore, must be chosen with this truth—palatable or otherwise—in mind; if it is not so chosen, we shall get in a fog. We must, on the contrary, work gradually from the concrete towards the abstract ideal, always seeing to it that the lesson in the most objective bit of literature be wholesome and holy. The ethic quality may be as strong, be it remembered, in the straightforward story of narration as in the pious preachment; the sermon may be there, though hidden in the envelopment of art,—the reader being all unwillingly influenced by what George Eliot calls the “slow contagion of good.” I knew a teacher in a Sunday-school who was looked at askance by some of the members because, after the more serious matters were successfully dispatched, he read to his class of urchins Aldrich’s little masterpiece, *The Story of a Bad Boy*. But I am sure it did them good (the attendance showed it interested them); and equally sure that the Sunday-school library is impoverished ethically

and otherwise which does not include that particular volume.

The difficulty of discrimination in schools in the matter of literature for boys and girls was spoken of: all other discriminations — that between backward and forward pupils, for example — are also difficult wherever children are taught and studied *en masse*. This suggests the noble function, the superlative importance, of the home in purveying literature to the little ones. Thus the child can get that individual attention, that loving study, as a detached personal problem, which, from its very nature, is beyond the province of the school. Those schools which are famous the world over for their fruitful methods — one thinks of Froebel and Pestalozzi — have taken their cue from the home. The kindergarten, in sooth, is an adaptation of the playground and nursery. No wonder it is being emphasized that mothers are the first teachers; that is, teachers not by rule, but from the nature of their inherent relation to the child; amateurs, not in the sense of ignorance, but lovers of the task. What may not parents in the environment of the home

accomplish for the cause of higher education! "With the mothers, and fathers too, aroused to the fact that they are teachers," says Prof. James P. Munroe, in his stimulating work on *The Educational Ideal*, "and that the home is a school-house; with the study which they must increasingly give, under this new light, to that complex organism, the child; with the psychological and psychical sciences resting upon data which shall be thus collected — the day for a rapid growth in educational methods is not far distant. . . .

Having, after centuries of wandering, brought the child back to his proper atmosphere, the home, having determined who shall be responsible for his teaching and what shall be the final aim of that teaching, we have, indeed, put the educational question upon a sound and healthy basis. We have at last learned how to follow nature, and we are beginning to understand that the best education, indeed the only right education, is a natural one."

So, in this matter of literature for the young, the influence of the home teaching is enormous; all the school can do pales

before it. Let the mother add to the poet's rhyme the music of her soft voice and beloved tone; let great fiction be read to the breathless group of curly heads about the fire; and the wonders of science be unrolled, the thrilling scenes and splendid personalities of history displayed. Children thus inspired may be trusted to become sensitive to literature long before they know what the word means or have ratiocinated at all upon their mental experience. It is comforting to reflect that a mother, a parent, wishing in our day to do this for the nearest and dearest, is helped as never before: by enlightened librarians and libraries of generous habits; by child literature from the best authors of our time; by plenty of good criticism furnishing a lamp to the seeker's feet. Children are lucky to be children nowadays, for the idea is pretty well disseminated that the choicest from all the garnered riches of the great world of literature should be given them, that they may early be possessed of thought and feelings that are true and large, sweet and beautiful.

